



# *Kings River Review*





kings river  
KRRreview



*Fall 2022*

The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

The *Kings River Review* is made possible by the support of Dean of Instruction, Dr. Todd Davis, and Title V Grant funding.

We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website ([kingsriverreview.com](http://kingsriverreview.com)) for submission guidelines:

*Kings River Review*  
995 North Reed Avenue  
Reedley, California 93654  
[kingsriverreview.com](http://kingsriverreview.com)



---

Number 3

Fall 2022

Editors

Viri Cuervo

Laura Hand

Cover Art

Laura Hand

Eileen Apperson, Instructor

*Kings River Review* logo courtesy of Steve Norton.

Printing by Dumont Printing, Fresno, California.

## Letter from the Editors

---

Dear Readers,

We are proud to present to you the fall 2022 edition of the *Kings River Review* in which we showcase the outstanding work of community college students from all over the United States. It was an honor reading all the submissions we received, and the selection process was very competitive. We are excited to congratulate the artists included in this edition. The work featured in this journal comes from artists of vastly different backgrounds, and yet, their works address quintessential themes that are universally relatable to all audiences. We are grateful to all the artists who were brave enough to share their personal struggles, heartaches, and uncertainty with our readers because without their contributions this journal would not have been possible.

It is our hope that you enjoy reading the work of the talented artists featured in this journal. We hope that the creative energy put forth by our contributors inspires and motivates you to find beauty and meaning in your daily joys and struggles. In sharing their work through this journal, our contributors have taken the first step in sharing their passions, their fears, and their hopes for better and brighter futures where creativity and emotional understanding come together to forge the spirit of art. May you find yourself within in these pages and discover ways to share your journey with others through the medium that speaks to you, whether it is a poem, a photograph, or simply a smile on your face.

Sincerely,

Editors of the *Kings River Review*

# Table of Contents

---

## Reedley College Featured Writer

Frame within a Frame

*Jua Lee*..... 02

## Reedley College Featured Artist

Precious

*Jonah Young*..... 10

Day and Night

*Jonah Young*..... 11

Blossoming Night

*Jonah Young*..... 12

The Handbook

*Jonah Young*..... 13

Moonlit Night

*Jonah Young*..... 14

## Poetry

With Love

*Noah David Roberts*..... 16

My Cat and I Want to See the World

*Gavin Garza*..... 18

Chocolate Cake and Dr. Pepper

*RC Davis*..... 20

Heartless

*Audrey Bergen*..... 21

Bluffing with Myself

*Tyson Higel*..... 22

King Woman

*Jordynn Sumpter*..... 23

i wish i knew you as a kid, but then again, maybe i did

*Sofia Jarski*..... 24

## Table of Contents

Crossing Over	
<i>Noah David Roberts</i> .....	26
An Optimistic Outlook	
<i>Tyson Higel</i> .....	27
Worry	
<i>Thomas Boyce-Pottichen</i> .....	28
A Terrible Sort of Flowering	
<i>Nikki Do</i> .....	29
Walking Silently Alone on a Cold, Dark Night	
<i>Artemis</i> .....	30
Living Whisper	
<i>Samantha Aguilar</i> .....	32
Midnight Invasion	
<i>Jay Rose</i> .....	33
Always the Blackbirds	
<i>Read Davis</i> .....	34
Sharing at the Breakfast Table	
<i>Tyson Higel</i> .....	36
Farewell	
<i>Michaela Lagas</i> .....	38
“If This Isn’t Nice...”	
<i>Veralyn Beaumont</i> .....	39
A Blue Pen	
<i>Artemis</i> .....	40
<b><u>Creative Nonfiction</u></b>	
All’s Faire in Love and Bore	
<i>Lavender Passalacqua</i> .....	44
The Bardo Between Yard Sales	
<i>Reginald Esterhase</i> .....	46
How the Moonlit Armadillo Stole the Jack of Diamonds from the Drummer’s Girlfriend at Midnight	
<i>Chris Pope</i> .....	50

## Table of Contents

### Art

Modern Being	
<i>Kaden Maguglin</i> .....	56
Tranquility Spring	
<i>Tina Tien Nguyen</i> .....	57
Depths	
<i>Kaden Maguglin</i> .....	58
Calaveras Big Trees	
<i>Ethan Perkins</i> .....	59
Inner Mind	
<i>Kaden Maguglin</i> .....	60
MCC Landscape	
<i>Ethan Perkins</i> .....	61
Limelight	
<i>Kaden Maguglin</i> .....	62

### Script

Mortal Tithes	
<i>Thomas Boyce-Pottichen</i> .....	64

### Fiction

Julia is Missing	
<i>Paige Crawford</i> .....	72
The Man Who Can't be Moved	
<i>Jamileth Moran</i> .....	81
Midnight Delivery	
<i>Lavender Passalacqua</i> .....	87
Dirt	
<i>Teddy Cleek</i> .....	91
In Your Church at Night	
<i>Reginald Esterhase</i> .....	96
Evenly Matched	
<i>Jamileth Moran</i> .....	101



A collage of various papers and textures including a calendar, a map, a postcard, and fabric scraps, with a central white banner containing the text "Reedley College Featured Writer".

Reedley College  
Featured Writer

## Frame within a Frame

---

*Jua Lee*

An empty antique frame hangs above the mantle in my living room. It is as large as a window and wears the scars of age. Faded gold paint patinas what is left of its chipped and worn skeleton that has seen more than one hundred years. In all of its grandeur, elaborate rosettes and ivy are carved into the woodwork that once framed a thick and heavy mirror. This mirror was given to me by an old neighbor from my childhood. She was up in years and was in the process of sorting out her possessions. She lived alone in a big red house on the corner of our street. Both her husband and her son had passed on and she had no grandchildren or family left on the west coast. The only family that remained was a niece that lived in Missouri. I spent many Saturdays as a child playing with her English bulldog and helping her in her flower garden. She taught me how to pull weeds, how to plant bulbs, and how to lay out white bloomed ground cover. She also taught me how to make and use a concoction of soapy water instead of pesticide spray on rose bushes to ward off gnats and mites. From her, I learned that dogs could not eat chocolate or grapes because it was lethal to their bodies and that California blacktop was too hot for doggy feet. From her, I also learned that lemonade was better when mixed with sun tea and that ice did not have to be made in ice trays if you owned a sturdy ice pick. In the colder months of the year, I would help her lay out pages of old magazines, mulch, and woodchips in her flower beds to keep the soil moist and warm for the winter. Her name was Miss Agnes and the mirror had long ago belonged to her mother. It was originally attached to a vanity set that was gifted to Miss Agnes' mother by a relative on her wedding day. I was twelve years old when I inherited it. Less than six months later, a month before I turned

---

thirteen, I became a child bride.

I had been assaulted by a nineteen-year-old boy who was visiting our Fresno chapter Church of Hmong Alliance with his youth group. They were preparing for missionary work and ministry training and doing a tour of the California sister congregations. He attacked me in a room lined with empty metal cribs in the church nursery. It was a Saturday evening, and I was alone, stocking the shelves with diapers and baby powder for the following day. I was wearing a red dress with a daisy print and my hair was in a braid, a braid that he wrapped around his fist so that I could not escape. Afterwards, I crawled under one of the corner cribs and I curled up and hid there. That is where my cousin and his girlfriend found me.

I did not have to tell him what had happened to me. And he did not bother to ask me either. Instead, he told me to come out from under the crib. He told me that I was safe and that they would drive me home. Though I do not remember getting into the car, I remember the drive home. My cousin told me not to say anything to my parents. He said that it would stain my parents' reputation and the church's, but his girlfriend told me to tell my parents right away just in case I had gotten pregnant. The thought of pregnancy made me feel sick instantly and I began to tremble. She put her hand on mine and told me that the same thing had happened to her sister and her mom was able to buy medicine to end the pregnancy. I don't remember what else was said after that on the ride home. I just remember feeling numb. When I got home, they left me at the curb at the end of the yard. Neither of them came in with me. They just drove off when I stepped out of the car.

The first person I saw when I walked through the door was my fifteen-year-old sister, Star. She took one look at my appearance and knew something had happened. I had not realized that my dress was torn at the shoulder or that the five plastic daisy buttons that closed the front had been ripped off. I did not know that my hair was disheveled and that the braid that she had plaited into my hair at the back of my head was now a mangled knot at the left of my head. I did not know that my nose was bloodied or that there were holes in my white little girl pantyhose and bruises on my knees. These were the things that my sister took in seconds before she rushed over to me and wrapped me in her protective arms. Those arms are where I stayed when I told my parents what happened to me. Those arms are where I stayed when my father could not look me in the eye. Those arms are where I stayed when my mother turned her back on me, full of rage because I was unattended, completely ashamed that this had happened to one of her daughters, unable to look at me as if I was blameworthy. Those arms are where I stayed when the elders, the men who represented my father's family, announced that my life as my parents' daughter was over.

Even though we were Christians, in my culture, as is the case in many Asian cultures, such an offense is not always punished, and to save face and protect my family's reputation, I was forced to marry my attacker. To the elders, there was no other choice. If I did not marry him things would look worse on the clan and on the church. To them, my reputation was already devastated, and I was already defiled and damaged. No one would want to marry me because I was no longer pure or innocent. And because there was a possibility that I may have been pregnant, it was better for me to marry the man who raped me since the child would be of his bloodline. The elder's agreed that no man would want another

er man's bastard and abortion was a sin in both religion and culture. In the end, the only rational thing to do that would save my father's, the church's, and the clan's reputation was to have me marry the man who ruined me.

A suitcase full of traditional Hmong clothes sewn and embroidered by my mother's hands, an old bible, and this mirror were the only things that came with me to my new life four hundred miles away from my childhood home. On that day that was disguised as a celebration and the happy union between two young people, my parents did not speak to me unless they were told to by the elders. I was also not allowed to address my parents. Many times, I saw tears in their eyes, but still yet, neither spoke to me freely. The only time my mother spoke to me that day was when it was time for the mother-daughter wedding ritual where the mother dresses her daughter for the final time. This ritual is the final ceremony performed before the daughter exits her father's house to join her new family, her husband's family. Instead of the traditional advice that most mothers give their daughters on her wedding day on how to be an obedient and dutiful wife and an honorable daughter-in-law, my mother just kept repeating the same three things to me. She said to me over and over again to remember to pray, to continue to love God, and to devote every day to forgiving my husband. After the ceremony was complete, I felt something inside of me die. Looking back, I think it was the child that was waiting to be rescued.

Though I wanted to hate my parents as much as my sister Star did for going along with this arrangement, I could not find it in me. Star argued with my parents that this decision was cruel and archaic. She had yelled and screamed then she begged and cried but my parents told her to remember her place and her duty to represent her family. Of all of my parents' daughters who were

groomed to be honorable and respectful wives and daughters-in-law, I was the one who took the duties most seriously. Star never cared to be Hmong though. She had realized from an early age that she was a lesbian and would never be accepted by custom or creed. Unlike my other sisters who were continually trying to be more American yet remained trapped within the culture clash that plagued much of the Hmong youth at the time, I just wanted to be a good daughter. I wanted to honor my parents and so I could not allow hate to fester in my heart for them because there was a part of me that understood that this was the way of our culture. This was the way that it had been for hundreds of years. This was the only way that it could be if our father's honor, respect, and dignity was to remain intact.

That day, the day I departed from my father's house, was the last day that I saw Miss Agnes. I wasn't supposed to leave the house, but I didn't care. This was my act of defiance. I went to say good-bye to her. I could not tell her that I was being wedded, only that I was going to go live with relatives in Southern California. She hugged me tight and told me that she knew that wasn't the truth of it but added nothing more. She told me that she loved me very much and that she adored me and would miss me terribly; then she kissed me on the top of my head and on both cheeks before she let me go. Two tears ran down her cheeks as I watched her heart break for me that day. I felt my own heart break in response as I watched her turn away, walk up her steps, and return inside. Miss Agnes died that winter.

My new husband was a violent man. He beat me most days and I was alone and too far from home to seek help or refuge. In one of his fits of violence, he threw me into the mirror, and it shattered into three large pieces and a million tiny shards. Some of those shards became embedded in areas of my back that I

could not reach, but the frame did not break. It remained beautiful and intact and whole and solid even without the glass. It remained with me even though many told me to throw it away because it was useless and no longer served a purpose. I refused and kept it anyway. That marriage did not last. I returned home before my fifteenth birthday, divorced and a disgrace to my community, but alive and not laid out in a box for my parents to bury. My sister Star rescued me.

I had made a collect call home from the nurse's office at school. This was the first contact I had had with my family in over a year. I was forbidden by my husband to ever contact my family on the day I left home. The night before I made the call, my husband had beaten me in front of his family members. They only intervened when he began to strangle me. That morning I had walked into the nurse's office and told her that I had been jumped the night before and that I needed to use her phone to call home so that someone could bring me Tylenol because I had forgotten to take some before getting on the school bus. The nurse left me alone to make the call. As I dialed the operator and asked to be connected, my hands shook uncontrollably. I crossed my fingers and prayed to God that someone would answer. I held my breath as the phone rang four times before somebody picked up. I could hear the operator asking if the person on the other end of the call would accept the charges. I began to cry the second I heard the person say yes, they would accept. It was my sister who answered the phone. She was home on a school day because it was senior ditch day. My parents were not home though. They were visiting family up north. As I spoke in Hmong, I told her to tell our parents that if they did not come and get me, the next time they'd see me would be at my funeral. I told her what had happened and that my husband was sure to kill me. She told me

to stay in the nurse's office and wait for her. She was on her way.

Star was seventeen and had stolen my parents' new white Chevy Astro minivan to come and collect me. The drive took her four hours. When she pulled up in front of the middle school, I cried, and then I climbed into the front seat, and we cried together. My husband was at work and would not be home until after dark. I did not want to return to our apartment, but I knew it would be safe. The final time I walked out of that door I left behind all of my belongings. The only things that I returned with were the clothes on my back, the shoes on my feet, the bruises on my face, and this frame that had once belonged to Miss Agnes' mother. I do not know why, at nearly fourteen, I decided to keep the frame with me. But now, at forty-two years old, I am glad that I did. As it sits above my mantle now, it reminds me that sometimes, people, much like things, will be viewed as broken and worthless and merely damaged goods, but to those that matter, they remain cherished and valued and worthy of protection, love, and rescue.



A collage of torn paper with various patterns and text, including a map, a green leaf pattern, and a blue and white pattern. A central white banner with a faint circular logo contains the text "Reedley College Featured Artist".

Reedley College  
Featured Artist



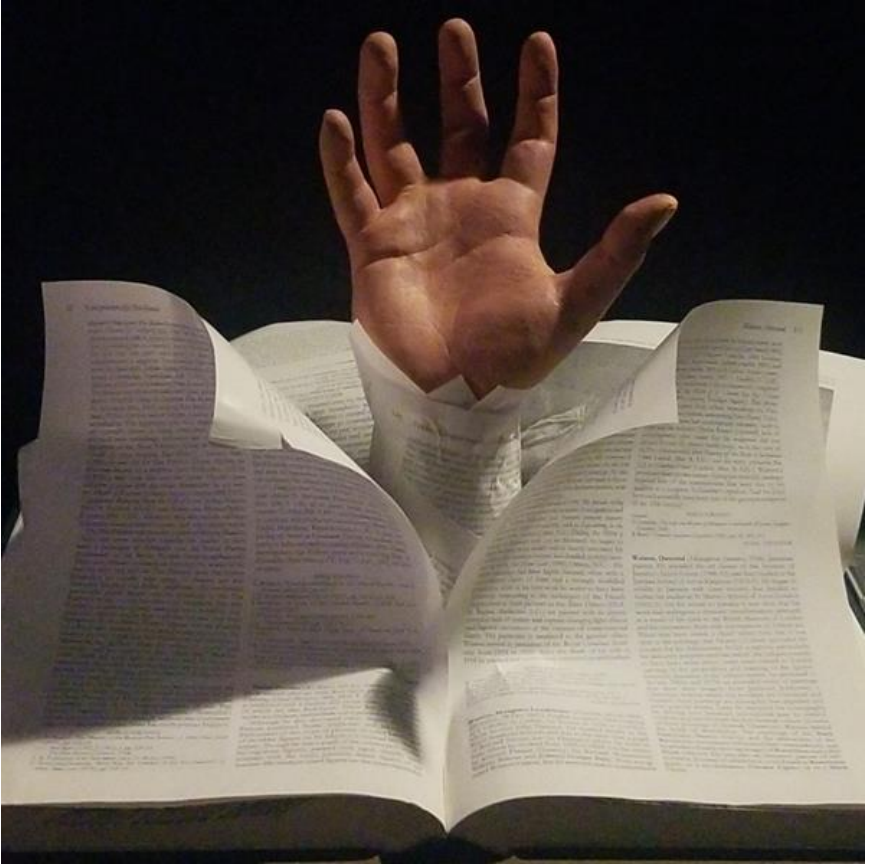
Stipple Ink Drawing



Oil on Canvas



Oil on Canvas



Sculpture



Spray Paint



po·et·ry

noun /'pōətrē/

literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; poems collectively or as a genre of literature.

I keep waking before the sun  
lights the dark world  
gasping wisps of sky  
illuminated by

the burning tip of a self-harm  
cigarette it remains desperately  
an incomplete poem of humanity  
in an old version of my body

it relives & reincarnates through  
remembering is the process of  
wringing out the dirty sponge  
like an old woman's hands

or memory is time travel  
supernatural poetry echoing  
through hollow voices from a  
metaphor—I am diseased

by the plague which we know  
as generational knowledge



---

or something that leaves  
burn marks indented in my

scarred skin becomes soft & torn  
like the notes I toss into  
the fireplace to warm my home.  
Nothing like the deception

of false love to know it is  
all the futile act of living.

## My Cat and I Want to See the World

---

Gavin Garza

Cynthia sits behind the screen door  
envying cats with basic porches.  
Down the road, a freight train roars  
(they don't *choo-choo* like they used to).  
Frightened, she nicks my ankle  
to comfort her.

Once, I thought, she was ostentatious:  
a bitch going through the motions.  
A Catholic lie.  
Only thirty bucks, she eats better than I do.  
(*That's why I choose Blue.*)  
Yogurt. I feel ugly tonight.

It's said salvation comes in a pen  
and a writing pad. Only,  
Cage says *create*,

but Bukowski warns *wait*.  
So I do.  
I take the bastard's word.

---

I use my elbow as a pillow.  
Watching the window, hoping  
something makes sense to me.

Cynthia's worried. *I know.*  
The rails moan again. I imagine  
an Amtrak for two.

Chocolate Cake and Dr. Pepper  
at Pedernales Falls for Mimi's funeral.  
We scattered her ashes by the water rocks.  
My great aunts told stories in their good  
Texas laughs. The whole day tasted  
like picnic table brisket. Sometimes,  
I imagine God as a location. A photograph  
on Mimi's refrigerator. My Aunt Robyn  
is a spiritual advisor nowadays.  
She prays in all fonts. Mimi used to go to church  
and whisper "She" when she spoke to her God.  
Her mother, my G.G., always wore a butterfly pin  
to symbolize how she lost and found her's.  
God, let me be a part of this matrilineage.  
I know I'm as man as Uncle John,  
but I want the spirit of a grandmother.  
I want to climb rocks and meditate  
and talk about my books and shake  
all of Texas with my laughter.

Loneliness carves a mark on the heart,  
even if everything seems alright.

Your heart pumps blood throughout your body.  
Your veins stretch out like delicate tree branches.  
Even with so many organs living inside you,  
they are not enough to keep you company.

Your loneliness is like an unrelenting sickness.  
Or a bruise that refuses to fade.  
It decides when it flares up, not you.

When your loneliness reaches its peak,  
it's as if your heart decided that today  
you are going to suffer.  
It is your puppet master,  
pulling all your strings.

## Bluffing with Myself

---

*Tyson Higel*

I'll demur the future, again.  
As I often do.  
I'll draw in vapor from my pen  
until the day anew.

And maybe, then, I'll decide  
I've finally had enough.  
But it's myself that I deride,  
perpetuating this bluff.

a miraculous invention  
the way a starving fear  
will feed off of anger  
in the eyes of the beholder  
in the belly of the beast  
there is a technique to this instinct  
in which your rage  
has no one to blame  
but yourself  
your reflection points a finger  
at the finger pointing at you  
yet what truly terrifies  
is it's written in your handwriting  
and you haven't lifted a hand  
since the day they were chained to the wall

## **i wish i knew you as a kid, but then again, maybe i did**

---

*Sofia Jarski*

at the same central library and the park and the rec center  
at the same time.

getting sick on the same swing sets and not even knowing.

you could be in the background of someone's childhood pictures and meet them years later and not even know it. my parents went to the same high school all four years and never met, but they fell in love at first sight in college.

something about timing,

something about serendipity.

i wish i knew you as a kid, but then again maybe i did

know you in every neighborhood child playing outside when it was still bright out, while i was in bed complaining to my mom that i wasn't tired. i knew you in the stray cat i loved to chase down the sidewalk. (he only ever came back to me when i least expected, too, just like you.)

i wish i knew you as a kid, but then again maybe i did

because you looked so familiar the moment i met you. put my finger on the sound of your name like trying to remember where i've heard that song before.

if i didn't know you then, i know you now: loud laugh like yours and irreverent sense of humor like me and poorly-healed scars in all the same places as me.

sometimes when you're upset with me, i get so angry



---

i can barely speak.

you call me by your dad's name as if i don't know exactly  
what that means. you turn ten years old again, scowling at me,  
wounds as deep and cut-clean as the first day.

i wish i knew you as a kid, but then again,

maybe i did.

Car windows smash into small pebbles  
of glass that crunch under your heels as  
you walk to the edge of the world  
buildings reach for the stars behind. You  
crawl towards the cliffs over which everything  
tumbles. Into eternity you will tremble with  
a neurotic tumor in your brain watching  
as the world metastasizes and transmutes  
into pleasurable destinies you will dive  
headfirst into the abyss tranquil and sleeping.  
The black is speckled with white and it is the sky  
that is endless not the world. A vast silence  
comes upon your need for noise. You are  
floating down the river with coins upon your  
eyelids embalmed in lavender. There is  
a sleeping fear beneath your body, a penitence  
for the imminence of falling, sonatas  
of love warble through the mist and  
enter your dreamscapes. It is  
a spell gone too far to drag you  
to the abyss.

Glassy reflection in water  
and mirror  
grasp my eyes,  
steer their gaze;  
latch my mind  
in ways ashamedly vain.

Even in a window pane  
my focus veers.  
How insecure  
I must be,  
constantly  
evaluating and gauging,  
rating and appraising  
the image I see  
of myself.

What value is in that?  
Not me, but the act?  
Find your answers in others.  
Trust what they see  
and say.  
Let them be your mirror today.

## Worry

---

*Thomas Boyce-Pottichen*

There is no waking moment without worry  
So I'd much rather sleep  
But a bed finds the hero is no story  
So my rest cannot be so deep

## A Terrible Sort of Flowering

---

*Nikki Do*

And so you're running through halls and the windows peak out into a centerfield of palm trees, hibiscus flowers, and weeds. Ignore it. Escape. Dash off a driveway and when the concrete falls beneath your feet and the ground reemerges with meadows among meadows of grass, dive into this blinding world. Clovers pepper the ground, but you must remember there are no four-leaf ones here. It's unlike what you know but somehow it's familiar—it's what you see in the fuzzy screen of your T.V. when you are only eight or nine or ten. For a minute, the world is shades of sage, olive, and sprinkles of periwinkle. If you are safe, you are not. If you think you are safe, then you won't remember this for another ten years. If you are lucky, no one touches you until you want to be touched. But people touch you. Even in your dreams.

## Walking Silently Alone on a Cold, Dark Night

---

*Artemis*

I do not dress, bundled for the cold.

The world is dark,

The atmosphere looming as it is night.

Yet, onwards I walk,

The Earth and its life silent.

I am always alone.

But the stars, they are not alone.

They do not get bothered by such simple things like the cold.

Perhaps the universe isn't silent,

Despite being surrounded by and being itself the dark,

Do celestial beings walk

As calmly as I do through our night?

The moon glows brightly against the canvas of sky at night.

For Earth, our moon, Luna, is alone.

Humans have traveled to her to walk,

Her cratered skin must be cold.

But despite that, people look up cloaked within the dark,

Looking at a body so silent.

The planets, despite what the humans think, aren't silent.

They create and play their music day and night.

Their own unique calls ringing through the dark.

---

The planets are, unlike us, not alone.  
The (non-existent) air may be cold,  
But amongst them, I would like to walk.

Our universe is vastly unexplored with places where nothing  
walk,  
Fastly evolving, changing, loud though it seems silent...  
I wish to dip my toes in its celestial waters that burn yet are so  
cold.  
I use my telescope at night,  
Gazing up at its horror and beauty, alone.  
Blanketed against the cities by the dark.

Is there anything that lurks out there in the dark?  
A thing that perhaps looks up (or down) at me on its own walk?  
Does it have companionship, brethren, or like me, is it all alone?  
I wonder if it speaks, calling out to me, or communicates just  
with looks, silent.  
I question its days... And how it lives in our shared universe at  
night.  
I hope it finds welcoming and comfort as I do, in the cold.

Despite the cold, especially in combination with the dark,  
I hope as the night drags on, as I stumble along on my walk,  
That I remember against the silent world, I am perhaps not alone.

There has never been a silence that did not birth a whisper in my mind. And that whisper is often so rushed to create a whisper of its own.

Of the day, are those perturbed and fragile thoughts; they bump into one another and start to dance, innocent enough at first. If I choose, I can stop them there; I etch their likeness onto the page and they, appeased, disappear but if the dance continues... They spin faster, faster, they could be as beautiful as an accomplished dancer or as ugly as a hurricane, no longer a whisper but a roar, a pilot to my mind's eye, for a time.

The whispers of the night, twins to their siblings, are not either to be ignored. The ones most important come gently, barely audible, even for a whisper. They tickle the mind with great promises with ideas from far off realms of awe. Like a butterfly they must be caught quickly, or they will fly out of reach forever. The ones that escape often feel like shattered petals of glass in my hands but their fleeting nature, like falling stars, is what makes them so beautiful.



## Midnight Invasion

---

*Jay Rose*

Taking a stroll deeply into life  
of night, buckled too tight are the windows  
keeping out darkness from cramping houses.  
Images roll and reel, sluggish creatures  
oozing through tight streets. Inky tentacles  
inching all along keeping deadly pace.  
Creeping, stalking, tip tap tapping terrors.

Curling on the outer sidings, black shades  
drag on, moving from brick to brick, shadow  
beings from madness now morphing monsters.  
Flickering from their forms, stagnant beings  
clamber loud on rocks. Hardened cobblestones  
sounding from countless shuffled demon hooves.  
Mincing monsters soon be marching onward.

### Part A

It's always the blackbirds that call to you  
Never penny lanes  
Or chats with Jude  
or marigold worlds beneath the sea  
It's the blackbirds  
Their cries that pierce the night  
Who have waited all their lives for this moment to be free  
And they are free  
So they call into the night  
Into your soul  
And they can scare you  
The molten brass molts weight from their wings  
Deposits rest in tons on your shoulders  
All the argon in their throats smoothly coats you instead  
As their melodies will carry into lands inspiring and beyond  
It is always the blackbirds that call to you  
With a song that can seem sickly only upon its remembrance  
Theirs the cry of redemption  
That falls over you like prison bars  
Or their hymns of freedom  
That send hands dancing across your cage

---

It's always the blackbirds that call to you  
Because all their lives they have waited for this moment to be free  
And all of your life you have known you are  
But you are not  
It's always the blackbirds that call to you

**Part B**

It's always the blackbirds that call to you  
Prisoner of your mind  
Soldier of the unconscious  
You are ready to drop your weapons and sing with them  
They would welcome your voice in the quire  
So take no further blind shots into the dark  
And sing sweetly, no bitters on the tongue  
Because it's what you wanted too  
It's always the blackbirds that call to you

Phone sharing  
(they've got something to show)  
over a plate of eggs  
and bacon  
at a restaurant;  
good morrow!

A meme,  
a profile,  
a picture  
or video:  
Something that was deemed  
reasonable to share.  
Pass me the phone,  
ensnare my co-dependency.

I see,  
I hear,  
I laugh  
and I  
think—

---

We eat it all like food  
at a table: Social activity.  
It's as delicious as gravy,  
and with it we're linked.  
But, societally,  
has it given us indigestion?

I see,  
I hear,  
I laugh  
and I  
question.

And when forever sleep comes,  
I'll know the beauty that starts to drum.

For the earth is much brighter than I,  
Songs and hymns that break to fly.  
Nature and nurture, mother nature can't reply,  
Everything is much greater than I.

Sun and moon, brighter than I,  
Trees and scenes, painted beautifully.  
Hearts and minds, stronger than I,  
Bees and things living amusingly.

Here I am to lay down my shattered life.  
When the time comes to die,  
I'll find the beauty within the lie.  
Here I am to say farewell to the afterlife.

## “If This Isn’t Nice...”

---

*Veralyn Beaumont*

Laying alone in bed, soft sheets against the sticky sweat of my skin in the summer heat, air spinning under a winding ceiling fan.

A book between my hands, the feeling of its smooth cover, thin paper, the scent of age filling my nose with each turn. Words leaping off the pages, communicating, mingling with my imagination to form a made-up world before my mind’s eye.

A bright smile, displaying a few crooked teeth in the front row, surrounded by a bush of dark brown. The boom of his voice. The passion, the curiosity shaping his words, humor filling the spaces in between; kind and genuine. Girlish giggles and wide grins, unfamiliar, yet my own. Something cold and sweet sitting in front of us – perhaps coffee or maybe ice cream – whatever it might be, it’s there to soothe his sweet tooth craving.

In the dark, my hungry fingers swim through the thick, almost black waves of his hair, like a surfer searching for their high as they soar across the ocean’s crests and troughs. In the dark, my open arms cradle his head, holding him close to me, feeling his grip tighten around my waist; carefully listening to the peaceful rhythm of his sleepy breathing, lulling me to dream like the hums of a sacred lullaby.

Little moments that send us rolling with contagious, uncontrollable laughter. Little moments that make my eyes well up with tears, completely overwhelmed by a happiness so foreign, a joy that feels like fiction. Little moments of fantasy. Little moments of stillness. Little moments of quiet. Little moments of simple things.

In little moments like these, the echoing words of Mr. Kurt Vonnegut ring in my ears: “If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.”

In my hands, I grasp,  
Something mightier than a sword,  
Beautiful, blue ink glides onto the paper before me.  
The words and ideas coming from my special blue pen.  
The notebook in which I write,  
Is a witness to my life.  
And the words of those before,  
Echo in my mind.  
However,  
I see not only the light, but the darkness embedded within,  
The darkness of death,  
When the possible thought that the person  
Who wielded it before,  
Was sacrificed for the creations made,  
By a flow of blue on paper.  
Did this not happen to Socrates?  
What makes my pen special,  
And different from the others,  
Is the idea,  
The feelings,  
Behind wielding this weapon.  
To call this a simple pen is an understatement,



---

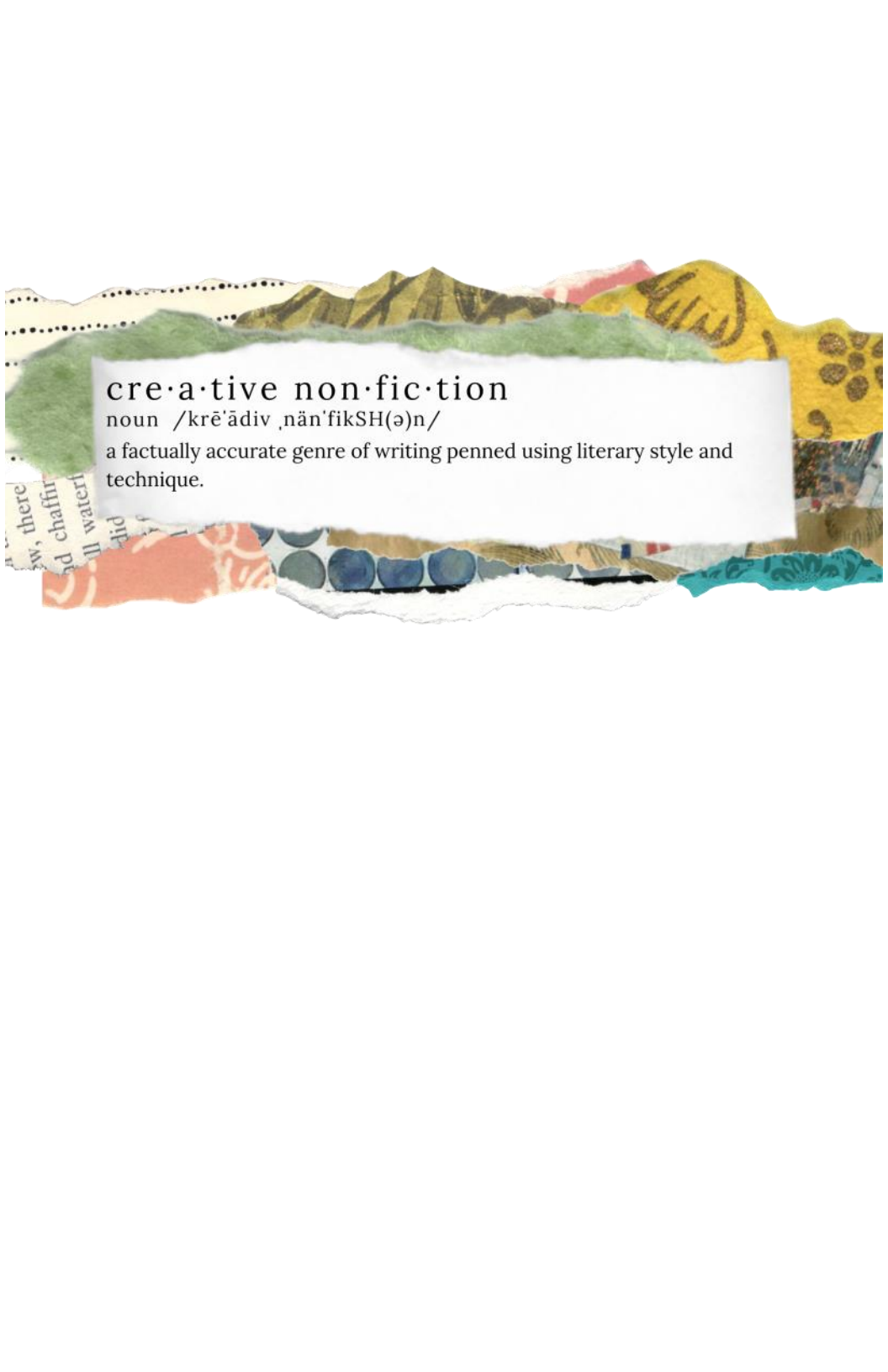
For this internally, is a sword.

Yet mightier, but no matter the strength,

Externally, it is just,

A blue pen.





cre·a·tive non·fic·tion

noun /krē'ādiv ,nän'fikSH(ə)n/

a factually accurate genre of writing penned using literary style and technique.

On the onset of fall, the sun beams down on a lively festival, fostering sacred weekends to remember till the next. Pike and axemen patrol the streets, tourneys of horse and lance entertain the masses, and fine food from many cultures fill their celebratory hearts to the sunset. Vendors holler from the dusty path side through the day, advertising tanned leather, glossy pottery, and above all else, fine ales. Dirt crunches under the soles of a thousand boots, ours among their ranks as we wander the market. We tell tales. We craft new ones. We live life.



Every winter, deep in the sprawl of San Francisco, lies a hidden portal that transports all who enter into an unfamiliar past. A telegraph boy cries a name loudly down the hay strewn street, Chimney sweeps covered in dense layers of soot mingle with passersby, and just past the docks, shanties can be heard ringing through the cold London air. The smell of meat pies and roasted almonds is constant. The roof of the complex traps the city in a lasting state of nighttime revelry. Characters stroll along the streets of a lost time, Victorian personas and costumes that allow us all to be transported across the waves into the past.



Throughout the summer, stress and heat stream through the walls at every crack. A computer's muffled hum scores its empty inbox, symphonizing with still air and heavy breaths. Mental gymnastics trap me behind doors both imaginary and self-constructed, starting with the door to my own room. Down the railway of thought trains come and go, shoveling scoop after scoop of piercing doubt into the furnaces to pollute my mind. I manage to break free of the trance just long enough to force myself out of the house and into the inviting daylight, fearful that

---

once again I would begin to fuse into my own seat.



Rays of rejuvenating sunlight split and turn around a maze of multicolor leaves. Gray squirrels pillage a downed bird feeder for supplies, unphased as I wander past them. The dormant remnants of a river lie in wait for the rains to return, and with them the rushing current. Thin trees tell intricate tales of life before mine, scars from decades past, scars from decades to come, untold answers to long forgotten mysteries never to see the light of day, nor the truth of night.



I imagine myself once again walking among others of the faire. Drinks clink in the golden sunset, coin shifts from hand to hand, sparks fly from sword to shield. I recall the Dickensian atmosphere of the winter. Sweeps wander through hay-stained streets, guards accompany a queen through each district, and the sweet tones of a dulcimer ring true throughout the lanes of a festive London.



In two hundred years' time, I wonder what of our own people will be celebrated. In two hundred years' time, I fear what of our own people will be conveniently forgotten.

## The Bardo Between Yard Sales

---

*Reginald Esterhase*

Across the tracks, strands of barbed wire hung loose above the chain link fence and flew from pole to pole like errant flies. Beyond was a field wild with weeds and shocks of yellow grass. Looming like a tombstone in the distance, a brick wall stretched the length of the field. At regular intervals large, steel beams pressed themselves against the wall in support. This ruddy remnant and its assistants had been there for years. At some time, someone had worked there, eager for wages, looking out of the windows, waiting for sunset, eager to spend. Through the empty windows were bright green trees whose heads peaked over the single, roofless wall that leaned on its crutches and waited. It wasn't historical, it wasn't sentimental, but it was kept in suspended disintegration and saved for later.

The oblivious ding-dong of the train's digital bells faded into earshot. As the train approached, the faint shadow of the ferryman was obscured behind the marmoreal reflections on the glass. The shiny obstruction came to a stop blotting out the field and the patient wall. The doors shushed aside and accepted the meager offering of the mid-day crowd who waved their plastic tokens. No one exited. The benches and floor were clean, not because they had been cleaned, but because they weren't old enough to have been dirtied. With a light tug, the train disembarked.

The train moved slowly over the crossing of a street full of impatient cars. The bells told them of our passing. Outside, along the tracks, were the backyards of homes and the backsides of businesses, the unseen parts of lots and yards where leftover boards and barrels were stored, and old cars were abandoned next to piles of bald tires. The charcoal parking lots of brown business parks full of cars gave way to a shopping center where a family loaded their van with their new treasures.



“Don’t tell mom, but I already took a load to Goodwill,” my father said while he searched for his drill among the cardboard boxes in the garage.

“I won’t,” I responded from the top of my ladder. We were hanging curtains in front of shelves my father had built. They were already full of boxes and there were more on the floor, all unmarked. One half empty box held stuffed animals that sat on stacks of magazines; in another, cassettes were wedged between books; another was a mass grave for pens, pencils, and toy cars. My father climbed his ladder and screwed the curtain rod hanger into place. A nearby box had a calendar with a wound of mold and some video games. “Memories?” he asked. I nodded but really there weren’t any. They were only things I had wanted and owned. My father dragged the curtains across the boxes of interred items hoping that if they were out of sight they would be out of his mind. I opened an older box exhumed from an earlier burial and was met by a sour smell. Inside was a pair of hiking boots for someone too young to walk. The eyelets were rusted, and the leather was stained. Next to these was a one-piece pair of pajamas with ears on the hood and paws for hands and feet. It looked like the hide of a cartoon cub. One of its feet had been eaten away and paper and cloth confetti clung to the stump. I dumped the box and its smell into the box with the calendar and games. I said I would save it but two weeks later I threw it away.



An automated voice emanated from the walls of the train advising us of our destination. The promontory of a granary, pock marked by broken windows, stood above the other buildings. Across the river another pair of tracks, abandoned, crossed the sidewalk and led the way down an alley. Through a patchwork of cobblestones, bricks and abstract slabs of concrete, the steel rails

ran as though nothing that came after them was as certain or intentional as them. Faded signs on buildings' sides memorialized past factories and feed stores that now housed restaurants and antique shops.

Brass bells jingled as I entered an antique store filled with a maze of display cases and bookshelves. Trinkets stood on ice rafts of glass and muddy banks of mahogany and watched the stream of potential owners pass them by. In a glass cage a herd of porcelain horses, frozen in mid gallop, yearned for a field. A parking lot of matchbox trucks, tractors and fire engines idled, waiting for work. A drawer held a salad of old photos filled with smiling, ashen faces. A library index of postcards was covered with scrawlings of "Best wishes", "Happy Birthday" and "Wish you were here." A bevy of vases vied for notice and cried out for flowers I didn't have. These motley masses, the spoils of liquidated estates, seemed to lean toward me. They crowded the glass and jostled for attention like orphans wanting a home or urchins beseeching a sale. But there were too many for me to choose. I couldn't take care of them all. There wasn't enough time. I needed air.

Outside the shop, the alley's ancient train rails slid under a fence. The beams curved with mathematic grace on their old wooden moorings, preserved but unrepaired. Along the shoulder of the tracks was a large hole, a grand opening, where the wood had rotted and fallen fully away. I retreated back across the river to where the digital bells would toll.

We gave a single sway as the train began to trudge homeward. Beyond the shopping center, full of cars, and the emptying business park was a string of storage units, their orange paint still bright and new in the crashing sun.



"Where do you want it?" I asked.

"I don't know yet. I have to find a place for it," my mother



said.

After school, after work, I stood in the headlights of her car, a box in my arms, outside one of her storage units. Boxes of differing sizes were stacked around the walls. Foldable blackjack, poker and roulette tables from a fundraiser leaned against them. A single bulb lit the whole room and the shadows it cast reached for my feet. The previous weekend she had had a fight with my father, and I found her crying by the trash, pulling her things out of the cans and putting them into boxes, one of which I held.

“Just stack them on top of these for now. I’ll come back and go through them later.”

Sometimes I imagine her there on her own again after another fight, holding another box, standing under the bare bulb of one of her plywood and metal mausoleums. I imagine her crying, as I have found her before, trying to find space among the unopened board games and the cardboard reliquaries of her plastic prayers for more time.



The skyline whittled down from businesses to homes to sleepy hills and flat fields. The husk of a rusted tractor looked out from the side of an old barn like an unadopted dog. The parking lots and backyards returned, the lights were on in the homes, making shadows out of the things in the yard left out until tomorrow. The bells tolled again, and the red lights flashed at the impatient crossing. I looked to the left, through the ghost of my reflection, and saw the long brick wall, blood red in the evening, its empty eyes eyeing the train — and waiting.

## How the Moonlit Armadillo Stole the Jack of Diamonds from the Drummer's Girlfriend at Midnight

---

*Chris Pope*

Four years and a thousand miles apart, I found myself acting in the very same comedy skit. The first time was on the Delaware/Maryland shore during midterm break in the fall of my first pass at sophomore year, at an anonymous Ivy League school in New Jersey, where I was majoring in chemical dependency - oops, chemical engineering.

In a rare outing with a destination besides wherever young people were getting wasted, I drove the thirty miles down the Delaware coast on Route 1 from Lewes, Delaware to Ocean City, Maryland. Scenery was flat sand with low dunes if any on both sides, with World War II observation towers that were too sturdily built to be worth toppling, and an anomalously high bridge over the Indian River inlet. But the sun was setting, so the scenery I'd seen dozens of times before was fading fast.

To save money on bar brew, I bought a 6-pack of Molson Golden upon entering Maryland, just south of the Mason-Dixon line. Maryland's convenient age of 18 for beer and wine was safer than risking getting popped for buying underage in Delaware, my being 11 months away from turning 20, although in praxis the drinking age was 5'2" (for males; the rules were aggressively relaxed for women and soon-to-be-women). The late 70s were an experiment in lower drinking ages in much of the country, especially for many states in the Northeast. Driving across state lines for lower legal drinking ages was commonplace. Unlike where I live now on the central California coast, where the closest state line is 4 hours' drive away, those boundaries were much more accessible. Every inch of Delaware is no more than 35 miles from the Maryland state line. And yes, Maryland's 20-year-olds seeking higher-octane beverages than beer and wine drove to Delaware. New Jersey's age was 18 for everything. I thought it auspi-

---

cious that my 18th birthday coincided with my arrival on campus in 1978. But members of Princeton's "eating clubs" which lined Prospect Street would often drive to Delaware to procure the 190-proof potions needed for that Saturday night's punch. Musical chairs with cars and bars, cans and bottles. A strange era for ethanol-seeking youth in a distinctive part of America - a short-lived time that was adventurous, free-wheeling, and perilous.

Onward I rolled to the Back of the Rack, a popular nightclub which was home to local talent and local burnouts. I finally was getting to see Jack of Diamonds, the most successful band ever to hail from Lewes... aka Dodge City, which was also the name of their first and only album. I pounded down two bottles in the parking lot before entering. The sparse off-season weeknight audience was bimodally distributed in the darkness near the stage and the uneven back row of round tables near the well-lit bar. I met a fellow member of Cape Henlopen High School's Class of '78. I mentioned I was looking to buy weed. I always was. Ninety percent of Cape students smoked pot at the time, and we didn't stop after graduation. He said he'd get me some from one of the band members if I would stay until after the break.

Leaving the bar with a Budweiser in hand, since they did not sell Molson, I saw a 30-ish woman sitting alone at a well-lit table in the middle of the back of the Back of the Rack. Asking first for permission, I sat to her left, leaving 4-5 feet distance between us. The conversation quickly revealed that she was the drummer's girlfriend.

Turning my head and upper body far enough left to clearly see the stage over 20 yards away, I found the drummer staring directly at me. The grimace of a man mad enough to rip the heads off of puppies and drink their blood shouted to me, "She's my girlfriend. Don't fuck with her... or this'll be your head, motherfuck-

er!," followed by a savage beating on the defenseless drums in front of him.

Fearlessly returning his gaze, I nodded my head to him, answering "I know she's yours. I won't fuck with her." His facial expression did not soften much, but its temperature dropped about 700°. He returned the acknowledging nod, which read, "That's good.... But you'd better not, or this'll be your head, motherfucker!", followed by another rage-filled attack on the drumheads.

The next hour saw me sporadically talking with the drummer's possession, with no hint whatsoever that either she or I had anything in mind beyond talking for the sake of being humans at a table in a four-fifths empty nightclub. Occasionally I would look at the stage, only to see the little drummer boy glaring straight at me.

My thrilling night out ended unexpectedly and way too soon, because of my first experience of Molson Golden's infamous animosity towards any other kind of beer in its gutspace. It fought with the Bud until the winner chased the loser out of my mouth while I was in the men's room. I left immediately thereafter, not even staying long enough to get any herb.

From October 1979 to May 1984 would make a good movie in its own right. Shortly after I dropped out of Tigerland, I enrolled in a local psych ward, because Lucille had messed my mind up... then thrice weekly therapy, then AA and NA. My "Higher Power" saw fit to move my dried-out brain to a Big 10 school sited in the hometown of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. This small city of 80,000, abutting the northern boundary of Chicago along Lake Michigan, had zero liquor stores, and only 3 bars at which one could purchase Demon Rum or its kin without also having to order food.

Near the end of every spring quarter was Armadillo Day, an all-day party in and around the Student Center. Perhaps the most unimaginatively designed college campus building ever, the Nor-

ris Student Center was a concrete cube, and nearly windowless save for two of the middle floors, where views of the lake were tolerated. Long called "The Box the Library Came In," in part since it lay near the three book-filled neo-Brutalist towers connected by above-ground walkways that was another of the same architect's abominations but conceived on a slightly more frivolous day. The student center made the neo-Stalinist architecture of the engineering building look downright festive.

But at least for one Saturday of a three-day weekend, it was indeed lively, musical, and cheerfully joyful... or whatever phrases best describe the social mien of people who are either stoned out of time or tripping their asses off. I tried to talk with one friend of mine, but his pupils were as large as the spaceship that had hijacked his brain.

The high point of Armadillo Day was an evening concert. One dollar bought admission to David Grisman and his band, playing in the dining area of the cafeteria on the lower main floor. Sunday afternoon often saw me there with my patty melt and fries for breakfast since, for reasons lost in antiquity, the student dining halls were closed all day Sunday, leaving hungry would-be scholars to fend for themselves. I knew of him from *Old & In the Way*, for decades the best-selling bluegrass album ever, probably because Jerry Garcia played banjo on it.

Arriving late enough to miss finding a seat, I settled for leaning on a four-foot-high wall enclosing the dining area, which tonight included the stage. After a while, I started talking to the lone woman about 5 feet to my right. As before, the obligatory question of "why are you here?" yielded the same answer: she was the drummer's girlfriend.

The rest went according to the script. Roll the tape...

\* I look at insanely pissed off drummer glowering at me and viciously assaulting the drumheads.

\* I nod at drummer with the same solid psychic stance as a martial arts opponent of equal dan, asserting my assurance to him that I know she is his gf and will respect that.

\* Stoic but severely stern nod from drummer, followed by vigorous drum abuse.

\* Occasional checking out the emotional temperature of the drummer throughout the show, who was invariably staring at me as his territory, and I stood about a fathom apart.

I asked the drummer's girlfriend if they were going to play Midnight Moonlight, my favorite song from *Old & In the Way*, and one of my favorites ever. She said they would, which was lucky for me, since I found out decades later Peter Rowan wrote it, not the headliner.

With a gizzard free of ethanol, I stayed through the entire performance, rarely speaking with the spoken-for lady. I can't say the band's rendition of Midnight Moonlight was the brightest I'd ever seen, since it was the only live performance of it I've ever seen. But it was my second live performance as the leading man of this vignette of farce trying to keep from becoming an action thriller. I wonder when round #3 will take place.



art

noun /ärt/

the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.



Ink on Paper





Photography



Ink on Paper



Digital Art



Digital Art



Digital Art



Pen & Ink on Paper



et consectetur adipiscing elit. Quam  
ad laudis ad rem. Scelerat

of the  
Notice

# script

noun /skript/

the written text of a play, movie, or broadcast.

# Mortal Tithes

---

*Thomas Boyce-Pottichen*

AT RISE:

*Interior of a medieval field hospital on the outskirts of a battle ruined town. In the background are a number of beds with dying soldiers in them, props rather than actors. Stage right stands NURSE with spotlight on her, and center stage is another bed with a human sized lump under bloody sheets. Leaned up against the bed is a shield and spear.*

*A spotlight shines on the center stage bed.*

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Nurse!

*NURSE drags herself to the bed at center stage and begins tending the wounded.*

*Enter stage right, WIGHT. He is an undead soldier, and lieutenant to a lord of evil.*

WIGHT

Ah, the humble nurse on her mortal toil. I have come to collect my master's rightful tribute, for I am DEATH.

*NURSE picks up the shield and spear.*

NURSE

You are not Death, you are an abomination, wight!



---

WIGHT

(Sighs) It's true. I despise that wretched psychopomp the Grim Reaper as much as you, but I do come to harvest a ripe crop. From what I see, the wealth of this room would settle a great debt.

*WIGHT walks around the bed to the other side. He attempts to peer under the blanket but is warded off by NURSE*

NURSE

This is extortion beyond the natural sort for your lord, is it not? His call for sacrifice is never taken before the solstice.

WIGHT

I was invited to collect our tax early.

NURSE

You are certainly not invited here! Begone! If you must, go back to town to exact your tribute when it is properly due, through morbid lottery as it has always been done before. I will allow no patient under my care to be taken.

WIGHT

You may not be so inviting, but we are both bound to obey our masters. The lord of your town has rebuffed me.

NURSE

With its ruined walls? A sick joke.

WIGHT

Ha, then I should say, it has deflected me here instead.

NURSE

What?

WIGHT

Deflected me. Like armor does a blade.

NURSE

They directed you here? To the hospital?

WIGHT

Oh yes. Much better than lottery, don't you agree? No risk of the tribute being too young and small, nor too old and brittle. The undead hordes can stand a missing limb. Besides, as your lord has said, "They're soon to perish regardless."

NURSE

My lord would do no such thing!

WIGHT

Your lord would not consign soldiers to their death?

WIGHT looks around.

I'm sure of that. I arrive then, at the twilight hours of a terrible battle, by sheer coincidence.

NURSE falters, lowering the shield and spear.

NURSE

“A ripe crop...”

WIGHT

Such bountiful harvest is a rare occurrence absent certain... cultivation.

NURSE

So then my lord has conspired against me!  
That does not mean I will as callously abandon my patients.

WIGHT

How principled. But I must ask, what do you find so abominable about defeating death when you work so tirelessly to do so yourself?

NURSE

You are a walking corpse. You haven't defeated death but embraced it.

## WIGHT

The truth is quite the contrary, actually. You have been lied to about more than just when tribute is due. In truth, there are forces in this world that do nothing but organize that death eventually occurs. I'm afraid the only conspiracy is the one between men like your lord that send soldiers to their doom, and the psychopomps their machinations ultimately serve. We undead have always been the forces opposed to their endless cruel cycle. Our annual tribute is not to kill, but free from both life and death.

*WIGHT extends his hand.*

## NURSE

What folly.

*WIGHT retracts his hand.*

Your fight against death is unnatural necromancy. Even the most savage of wounds can be healed, death prevented in the first place, rather than undone. Tell me, in this grand conspiracy of which you speak, what makes me any less of a conspirator? I live and can die. I will play a part in the organization of death, but I heal others, prevent death.

## WIGHT

It makes you a conspirator on the precipice of defecting. I feel that you know us undead are not any more unnatural than any living being that fears death. The boar does not stitch his wounds when the hunter goes him, but the hunter will. You and I are the hunter. We fear death so we do what the boar cannot, the unnatural. The boar can die its noble death and become trophy to the power that killed it, but us? We can never be made trophies of death.

#### NURSE

Fine, so you hate death. I still have my obligations here to do as I have always done, keep my patients alive. I cannot betray those duties.

#### WIGHT

Your only obligation as you are living, is to die. That is the mortal coil you find yourself in. But I can break your mortal bond and free you. My very presence here has prevented lives from being reaped. Death fears undeath. If there was another wight, one that truly understood the contemptibility of death, no reaper would dare come near your patients.

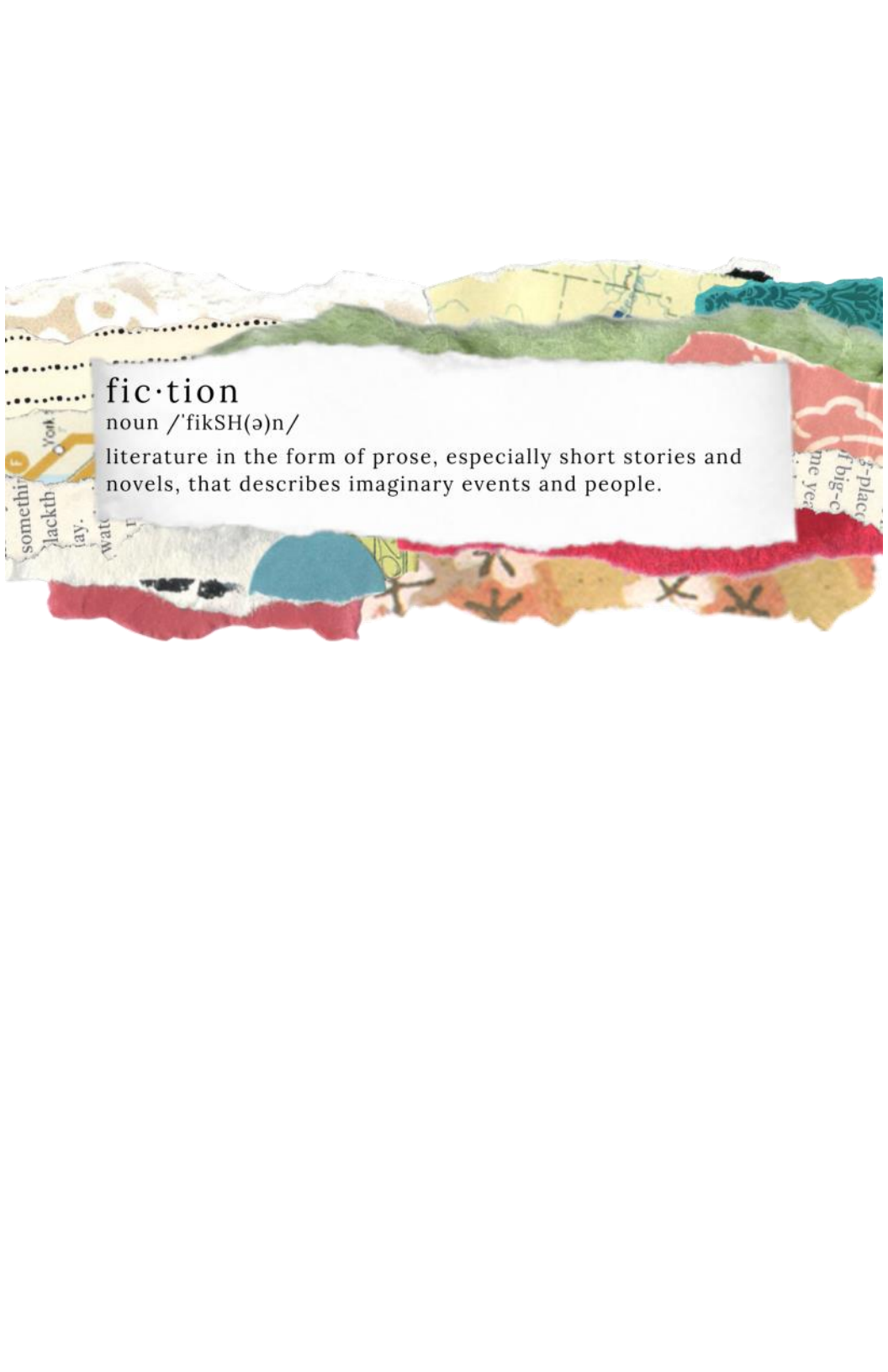
*WIGHT extends his hand again*

Returning with even one wight that understood that and who would swear fealty to

undead, would be more than worth the entirety of this hospital in absolving the debt due.

*NURSE hesitantly takes his hand*

(END OF SCENE)



# fic·tion

noun /'fikSH(ə)n/

literature in the form of prose, especially short stories and novels, that describes imaginary events and people.

They say the first few nights of moving are the worst because you feel homesick, but that wasn't troubling me. Instead, nights of less sleep and impossible dreams plagued me. Canada had been home to me five days ago, but my soul was left there, and my body became loose in America, specifically Wisconsin. It was just as cold here as it was in Canada. The chill of early hours nipped at my nose and my fingers grew numb from the bitter cold seeping through the walls of an upper-class apartment complex. I didn't mind being in a new place, I minded the dreams that I could not live.

The doctors said the move would be good for me, that it would fix my insomnia and cure my depression. The problem was, I didn't have depression and I wasn't bothered by insomnia-my parents were. When you can't live your dreams, the next best thing to do is ponder them before a long day of high school. I looked forward to my insomnia. It gave me something to do other than course work. It gave me time to think without academics.

My parents started me on chamomile tea when they awoke to coffee brewing at four in the morning. When the strum of a guitar began at three in the morning, they sought to over-the-counter sleeping pills. At two, they grew impatient and insisted I try harder to sleep. When one in the morning rolled around, and my lamp started turning on, they shuffled me off to the doctors and we came back with a shiny new prescription of Ambien and an anti-depressant. Since then, my mind became awake at one as if it had its own internal alarm clock. The useless Ambien began to disappear with a flush nightly.



My internal clock woke me up. One o' three. I didn't feel groggy, but instead I was bored. I took to the window overlook-



---

ing the apartment's shared balcony and waited for my favorite sight.

The mysterious girl with dark blue hair appeared and walked to the guardrail. Her usual thirty minutes of watching the vacant street below passed quickly as a glimmer of happiness rose inside me. I felt less lonely, even if I had never spoken to her. We shared a common habit that many people didn't understand. I wanted to talk to her but didn't have the words to speak. On cue, one thirty rolled around and she took a seat at the bench, one leg crossed over the other, and rested her face in her palm. I grew nervous, wondering if I should muster the courage to say hello.

If I didn't speak to her now, I never would later. Sliding on a coat, I silently left my apartment and tiptoed down the stairs. I found myself hesitating at the glass door that led to the public balcony. In disappointment, I turned around, heading back to my apartment, to spend another early morning pondering the mystery girl and analyzing my dreams.



Six minutes past one in the morning. The blue haired girl was already outside, and my sketchbook was ready. However, this morning, I felt groggy and tired. Like I wasn't quite awake. I drew her and the balcony and filled in the sky around her with recollections of my other dreams. A comically large pill to her left and wisps of faint faces to her right. I glanced at my work and thought deeply at my predicament.

I could talk to the girl, or I could contemplate the meaning of faceless people staring at me as if I had something wrong with me. Maybe I did have something wrong with me. The doctor seemed to think so.

With the courage I could scrape together, I dressed in clothes I had mentally picked during school. My need to impress

the girl had begun to interfere with my education. Once again, I found myself at the glass door and this time, I was able to touch the door handle. I let go, as if I had been shocked, and turned around, briskly walking away. But did I want to spend another night pondering more dreams? Gathering my courage, I paced back to the door.

The cold immediately enveloped me. The girl sat on the bench and peeked up, staring at me with wide eyes. She wore a black long sleeve shirt and green cargo pants.

I strode over to her, preparing an attempt at a coherent sentence.

“Hi, I’m James,” was all that came out.

She smirked and slightly cocked her head. “Julia,” she said and nodded to the seat across from her.

“What brings you out so early?” I pretended to not know her routine.

“Just can’t sleep, I guess.” I studied her face and determined she was only a few years older than I was. The sight of her deep brown eyes made me question whether a twenty-something-year-old would hold any sort of meaningful conversation with a seventeen, going on eighteen-year-old.

“Me neither.”

A few seconds of silence passed between us, but it didn’t feel awkward. I was enamored with her. Undeniably, she was gorgeous. Perhaps it was easy to fall for someone you didn’t know based on their appearance, but my excitement also consisted of watching her from afar every morning. I was finally interacting with the mystery beyond my window. Questions of what she liked, what she despised, if she dreamed as vividly as me, was even better than just a pretty face.

“What keeps you up?” she asked while furrowing her brow. I felt more in awe of her as her expression and thoughts were

demonstrated through her face instead of her voice.

“Um, it started strange. I began waking up earlier and earlier. I never fell back asleep, and eventually one in the morning was my time to rise. I always feel wide awake, except today. I have sleeping pills, but I just flush them down the drain. They’re worthless.”

She giggled softly and crossed her fingers on the table. “I tried sleeping pills too, they were garbage.”

“I know people with insomnia usually say they want to sleep more but can’t. I love dreaming, but the stillness helps me ponder my dreams and I get a chance to think without someone asking me an English question or what the circumference of something is.”

“I rarely dream. I work all day, come home at night, sleep a bit, and then wake up,” she paused and then looked directly at me, “What do you dream of, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Sometimes it’s movies and my life mixed up to create weird situations. Other times, its huge pills falling from the sky and landing at my feet. I always panic because I think it’s going to crush me. My favorite, though, is the ones where I’m weightless and can view whatever I think of. But it’s so much more vivid than that. It’s colorful, bright, detailed, and without consequences. The forest is green, and the sky is blue with daylight, yet I can also see the stars.”

“I just dream of family, really. Yours sounds so much more interesting. I don’t think I’d want to sleep either if I could control my dreams and they made sense at times.”

I smiled, feeling like I was somewhat intriguing. Someone worth getting to know. She made my insomnia more than just a condition or side effect from the alleged depression. She made it normal.

She stood up and stuck her hand out to shake mine. “I’ll see

you tomorrow?"

"I'd love to," I admitted. With that said, she turned around while humming to herself and exited the balcony.



The next few nights, I met with Julia. She told me of her waitress job at a dive bar and how one consistent customer demanded a different spoon for each section of his plate. I learned about her. She dyed her hair blue because it reminded her of the lake, which her dad used to take her to before he died. Her cargo pants were from a thrift store, and she had only tasted soda once. Her mood changed with the seasons, winter being her favorite.

On the fifth night of pursuing a friendship with Julia, I found myself talking to her about myself.

"Why live in an apartment complex, James?"

"Well, I haven't graduated high school yet, I still live with my parents. We just moved from Canada, actually."

She nodded and glanced at the sky as if mesmerized by the sight of a few sprinklings of stars. My dreams had given me a new perspective on what the sky could truly look like.

"And what brings you to the apartment complex?"

She continued looking at the stars while speaking, "Well, I live with some roommates with a taste in the more expensive way of living, but they offered me decent rent due to the number of people in one apartment. Plus, I had to get away from my mom. She drove me nuts."

"I think I drive my parents nuts," I said. She glanced back at me and twisted her hair.

"Why's that?"

"They're adamant to find me a cure. The doctor told them I have depression, but I don't. I feel fine, and the insomnia is not bothering me. They even had me do a sleep study and found noth-

ing wrong. I feel pretty normal. The only thing bothering me is people insisting something is wrong with me.”

“Hmmm,” she muttered.

“It’s like they have forgotten I have a personality. In the morning, they ask how long I slept, if I’m taking my meds, if I feel depressed. They never ask if I’m adjusting to school, if learning more about American culture is weird, or if I’ve even made friends.”

“Then I’ll ask.” She smiled, and paused, then rested her head in her palms. “James, how is school?” She raised an eyebrow.

“Fine. I’ve made a group of friends, it’s all typical,” I shrugged.

“How is adjusting to America?”

“Obnoxious.”

She frowned, “Well no wonder they aren’t asking, you give the shortest and most boring answers. Take it from me, the more effort you put into communicating with your parents, the more they’ll interact.”

When Julia left that early morning, I went to my room, laid down, and waited for my alarm clock. This time, when I closed my eyes, the alarm clock woke me up from sleep, and not just pondering my inner thoughts with my eyes closed.



After a month of talking to Julia, I fell in love with her, except it wasn’t romantic. I fell in love with her whimsical, and almost dream-like personality. Every morning, I saw her. Some days she left at three and others she left once it was time for me to get ready for school. I looked forward to talking to her, even if she was older than me. She never seemed to mind my age.

Then it came crashing down.

Julia wasn’t on the balcony below my window at one, as usu-

al. I didn't have to glance at the clock to confirm the time. Since meeting Julia, I was exhausted, but still going to see her. Today, I was wide awake. I had not felt like this since before meeting Julia. But this time, she still wasn't there when I made it down. She must have left for something, and surely, she would be back.

I waited thirty minutes for her and eventually began pacing back and forth until my mom's shrill voice interrupted, snapping me back into reality.

"James! What the hell are you doing out here?"

"I was waiting for a friend I had made. She has insomnia too; we just talk here in the morning."

My mom grabbed my wrist and towed me through the glass doors and upstairs to our apartment. I was confused over the time change. I certainly felt more awake than the last month.

"It is five in the morning," she grumbled.

"What? No, it isn't. It's at the very most two."

She stabbed her finger in the direction of the oven clock. She had not been lying to me. I should have glanced at the clock before heading down. Why wasn't Julia there?

"I thought you had been sleeping well for a while, honey," she ruffled my hair, as if trying to calm herself down, "For a month, actually. Your father checks on you at five, every morning. You've been asleep but talking a bit."

"Mom, I swear on my life I was talking to Julia, I don't know how to prove it, but it's true. Tomorrow morning at one, she'll be there."

"Go to bed, we'll call the doctor later."

I was ready to start my day but anxious about seeing the doctor. I glanced out my window as I headed to bed. Julia wasn't to be seen and I realized I had stayed in my pajamas due to my excitement.



The new American doctor's office smelled like hospital cleaning products. In the waiting room, baggy eyes and disheveled hair dotted every patient waiting to be seen.

My mom and dad had taken the day off work for me to be seen by a professional and when I was called to be seen, they both gripped my shoulders as we walked into the back.

"Ah, this is complex," the doctor with white hair murmured while reviewing my past records from Canada. "Tell me, James, do you typically feel tired in these dreams?"

"I have been lately."

"Do you feel tired during the day?"

"Well, yes. But most of the time I am wide awake at one and I go about my day just fine."

Our conversation continued, me trying to persuade him I was fine, Julia was real, and my parents must be misremembering. I buried the feeling of my parents possibly being right. They had always been observant about my behaviors.

"I'm going to have to say it's REM sleep behavior disorder." I gritted my teeth in annoyance. "It can happen anywhere from once a month to four times a night. In James' case, he remembers these events."

"Another diagnosis to add to the list," I muttered.

"Julia may be real, James. You may have seen her before, and she just carried through into your dreams. You may still see her during these episodes if it makes you feel better."



I flushed the Ambien down the drain, brushed my teeth, and dressed in casual wear. Once under the covers, I prepared to stay awake all night. I was going to prove Julia was real, that my dad had been mistaken about me being asleep.

When the time came, I was already pacing around. I didn't

bother glancing out the window to check if she was there. I just knew she was. She had to be. I headed down the stairs, skipping two at a time.

Swinging the glass doors open, I spied Julia, sitting on the bench, but with confusion crossing her face.

“Julia! You wouldn’t believe the day I had yesterday.” I swiftly walked to the bench and plopped myself down.

“I’m sorry? My name is Maya, sweetie.” She looked around as if waiting for someone to come to her rescue.

“Oh, it’s just that,” a tear escaped my eyes, realizing the doctor had been right. “I’m sorry, I must have seen you before and...”

She relaxed at seeing my tears. “Go on, I’m listening.”

“Oh, God. I was just diagnosed with this disorder called REM sleep behavior disorder. I must have seen you out the window for a while because I used to wake up at one every morning.”

“That makes sense, I wake up at one too.” Her eyes showed empathy.

“I guess I just started vividly dreaming, because I could have sworn we met every night, and your name was Julia. This was a mistake, I’m sorry.” I rose from the table, disheartened.

“Hey, what’s your name, kid?”

“James.”

“I’d love to be Julia and meet you again, James,” she smiled.



## The Man Who Can't be Moved

---

*Jamileth Moran*

There was a man that sat on the corner of the street I grew up on in South L.A. As far back as I could remember, he had always been there. He sat there all day and well into the night. He only left to use the bathroom at the restaurant across the street where he'd buy a coffee and greets all the waitresses with a warm "hello there, sweetheart. Hope your day's going well" and to go to his brother's house at night for a change of clothes. Then he'd go right back to sitting and smiling.

I walked past him every day on the way to school and every-day he'd shoot me a "hey there, sweetie. How are ya doin' today?"

I'd always ask, "What's your name today, sir?"

He'd laugh and say, "Today, I'm a Lou." Or a Stan. Bill. Frank. Lou again.

He always seemed so happy to talk to anyone who was around. The bus stopped right at that corner, and he'd engage all kinds of people into all sorts of conversations. He laughed loudly and whispered softly and just about anything that you could need to hear on any given day, he would say it.

I lived in a small yellow house with a perfect view of the corner. Whenever I was grounded to my room on the second floor, I'd open my window and yell across the street at LouStanBillFrankLou, "My mom is being impossible!"

He'd chuckle and say, "I guess that's where you get it from then, eh?"

Then my mom would come upstairs and yell at me some more for yelling at strangers in the street. Mom didn't really like that I'd struck up a friendship with LouStanBillFrankLou. She thought he was nice enough but that a young girl shouldn't talk so much with an older man "*porque uno nunca sabe.*"

But I found him fascinating. I'd finish my homework and

watch him from my window. I'd make note of who he talked with and for how long. I'd make up little stories of what their relationships were.

The middle-aged lady that always wore those big hats was surely his estranged sister who still kinda hated him. They looked alike but only spoke for like a minute every Sunday. She was angry at him because he had renounced the church after his beloved wife had committed suicide one Sunday while he was busy praying for salvation.

The man in the green van that drove around the neighborhood selling *pan dulce* was his favorite nephew and they talked every morning at 6:30 am and again every evening at 7pm. LouStanBillFrankLou loved him best because he always gave him free *conchas*.

Kevin, the cop on patrol every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, was absolutely the son of LouStanBillFrankLou's nemesis from college, where Lou beat him in a dance battle once and he never forgave him for it. His nemesis had since died, but his son, Kevin, wore the resentment like a badge of honor.

And me? Well, I was waiting on the day that LouStanBillFrankLou would admit that he was really my grandfather! That his good-for-nothing son had contacted him when he left me and told him to sit on that corner and make sure I had a good morning every day. It's really the least he could do.

Around the corner from my house, next to the laundromat was a little store that my mom let me go to by myself. I never felt like I was really walking alone because my adopted grandfather was always on the opposite corner watching over me. I'd walk into the store, and they'd say, "*Hola Pocahontas!*" you know, because of my brown skin and long black hair. It used to bother me because no one talked about Pocahontas being pretty. It was always Ariel and Cinderella that were the pretty ones, with their smooth, white skin and their big, blue eyes.

One day, I'd finally had enough, and I stomped over to LouStanBillFrankLou and cried out, "I *hate* being Pocahontas! She's the worst princess!"

Lou looked me over and said, "Well, I think she's the best princess. Wanna know why?"

I shook my head no, trying to stop my tears from falling.

"She's the best princess because *she* looks like *you*. I don't know how Disney got it so right. I bet your momma sent in pictures of you and they drew her from your face."

That was the silliest, most wonderful thing I'd ever heard. I ran home to ask my mom if she'd really sent Disney pictures of me. She said she must have forgotten, but perhaps my dad had shown them my baby pictures whenever he'd left. I swear from that day on, Pocahontas was my favorite princess. No other princess could ever compare.

As time went on, I began to worry about Old Lou. He'd sit out in the pouring rain, the blistering summers, the cold winters. He never missed a day. He clocked in sometime before I woke up and clocked out well after I'd fallen asleep. Once I tried to stay up and watch all night, but sleep won that battle. I worried especially because I knew our neighborhood was bad. Sirens went off at all times. Drive-bys were common and almost expected. Drugs and alcohol were a way of life. And still, he'd be sitting on that corner, day in and day out.

One time, I had this dream that there was an angel on the corner that was bleeding out of its eyes, ears, and nose. I awoke with this fear for LouStanBillFrankLou. I told my mom, and she was quiet for a bit. Then she said, "*Mira, Mijita*. Yesterday there was a drive-by shooting on the corner. A man was killed while he waited for the bus. Your step daddy went out to try to help him out, but the man was gone by the time he got there. *Ahora esta con Dios-ito*."

I was terrified. “Was it Lou, *Mama*? Tell me, please, is Lou okay?”

She said, “*Si, niña bella*. He had gone home for a bit. By the time he came back, the coroner had taken the body. You should be able to see your friend on the way to school today, okay?”

But it wasn't okay. I cared about him too much and I didn't want to lose him to a stray bullet. I ran up to my room and looked down, searching for Lou. The corner was still blocked off with yellow tape, but just off to the side was LouStanBillFrankLou, a cup of coffee in his hand, chatting animatedly with a bus rider. I remember I was so relieved, I cried. I knew that if he stayed on that corner for too long, I'd eventually lose him, and I wasn't ready to live my mornings without him.

The next day, I walked up to him with such purpose that he stood and gave me a salute. “Well, hey there, sweetie. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“Hi Lou. I was just wondering why you're always sitting on this corner. Wouldn't you much rather sit at home and watch tv or read a book?” I asked, for the first time in my 11 years.

“Well,” began LouStanBillFrankLou, “I'm sitting here because I'm waiting on somebody. See, she's said she'd be right back, and I said I'd be right here waiting. So here I am, waiting for her, every day.”

“How do you know she's coming back?” She'd been gone for at least 11 years. In my mind, there was no doubt she was gone for good.

“I guess I don't *know* that she's coming back, but I sure hope so. And when she does, all the waiting will have been worth it, just you wait.” Lou smiled. I was young, but I could always read the sadness in people's faces. It was a skill I'd picked up from living with my mom. There was no sadness in LouStanBillFrankLou. He was all joy and hope.

“What’s her name?” I asked. “Maybe I can help you look for her.”

“Her name is Daisy Thomas and she’s the love of my life,” he said, with the biggest smile on his face. “You wanna see a picture of her?”

I nodded yes and he pulled out an old, worn out, leather wallet. He handed me a picture that was so faded, I could barely make out the shape of a woman.

“That’s my Daisy,” he said proudly. “I’ve carried her around with me since we graduated high school, and I went into the army. When I came back from Nam, we met up for coffee across the street and then I walked her over to this bus stop and I watched her leave. She said she’d be back, so I’m just waiting on her. It’ll be any day now, I’m sure of it.”

That’s about when my mom had noticed that I wasn’t home, and she yelled for me to return home “*en este mismo momento!*” I said bye to LouStanBillFrankLou and ran home.

I asked my mom about Nam. She had no idea what I was talking about. She had immigrated from El Salvador in the mid-nineties and had never cared much about American politics.

So, I went to the library and asked the librarian what Nam was. She showed me some encyclopedias and taught me how to research almost anything I could ever want to know. That’s how I learned that Nam or Vietnam referred to a war that ended in 1975. Lou had been waiting on the corner for over 30 years for his Daisy. It made me so sad and angry and confused. How was Lou’s love so strong? I didn’t understand. So, of course, I took it out on my mom.

“*Mama*, how long did you wait for *Papi* to come back before you decided he wasn’t worth waiting for anymore? When did you decide to give up on our family”

My mom looked like I had slapped her. “*Mi cielo*, why are you

asking me this.”

“How long, *Mama*? Lou would have waited 30 years for him. How could you marry someone else so soon? Why didn’t you wait for him?” I was sobbing. I couldn’t understand how my mom’s love could be so fallible. My stepdad was mean when drunk, but otherwise, he was an okay guy. I didn’t hate him by any means, but he always made sure to remind everyone that I was his *step*daughter, not his real daughter like people assumed because we were both brown. I felt like I was just the baggage that came along with his perfect wife.

I didn’t wait for an answer, I just ran out the door to where LouStanBillFrankLou was sitting, reading a book. He held me while I cried about my mom not waiting for my dad to come back. He let me cry myself calm before he cleared his throat and pulled away to look at my face.

He said, “Honey, not everyone is worth waiting for. Your daddy wasn’t built for responsibilities. When things got tough, he couldn’t deal, and he bolted. That’s not what a good man does. That’s the coward’s way. You and your momma deserved better than him. I think he knew that and left to make space in your life for more. Him leaving had everything to do with him and nothing to do with you or your sweet momma.”

“What about you, Lou? Don’t you deserve better than waiting for Daisy?” I asked, once I’d settled.

“Sweetheart, I am living the life I deserve. I’m happy here, don’t you worry about me,” he said, his eyes twinkling as always. “Now go say sorry to your momma, okay?”

So, I did. We ended up moving to a different city the following year. When Google Earth came around, I made sure to check the corner for LouStanBillFrankLou at least once a month. He was there until I checked in June 2017. I wonder if Daisy came back.

Personally, I've never been one for nightlife of the city; stumbling past sloppy drunks and shitfaced cops was never my idea of fun. Harris though, he runs a good enough joint. He keeps the place tidy and well stocked most nights, and any job I run for him is always met with the same satisfied nod and some free bottle of whatever he has left over from last week. The gilded walls of his place could whisper secrets great and terrible to anyone brave or sober enough to listen, but he makes sure nobody stays out of the party that long. That's good old Harris for you, the red bearded saint to which the masses flock for communion of Canadian whiskey and buttered bread. With a skilled enough eye from the balcony, one might be just able to pick out which poor sap dancing below actually knew where he was, or more rarely, why he was really there.



“Them’s some new burns.” Connor smirked at me, poking my cheek and sending a wave of burning pain through my face. “What, ya flap your gums off to a north-sider again?”

“Some idiot I was doing a job with decided it would be a great idea to light up at the goddamn station,” I grumbled back. “I’m lucky I was outside the car cause he sure as hell wasn’t.” I felt a deep weight in my stomach being in a car again after that, especially with what had to be the south-side’s worst driver. He was reliable though, and smarter than most. Murphy had in him the fires of a revolutionary and the wit of a salesman, cracking jokes with strangers one moment, dragging you out of firefights the next.

He carefully glanced out the window, “Why do we hafta go all the way out to the bloody countryside anyway? Harris knows damn well it don’t sit right with me.” He fumbled with a pack of cigarettes for a minute, finally conceding and motioning to me for

a light.

I reluctantly obliged, “Because the Canadian guy got dropped last week by a couple feds, Christ man I thought he told you.” Silence filled the cabin.

“Well,” Connor puffed thoughtfully into the wind. “Who we goin’ to see now?”

“Some geezer named Bline. Harris said she's got a couple of real breweries the feds missed, real premium stuff.” I coughed as he puffed another cloud into my face. “Jesus Con, do you have to smoke that shit while I'm in here with you?”

He stared blankly into the wet, grassy countryside for a moment, before quietly murmuring, “They remind me of home.”



Eventually, the truck sputtered its way up the hill to what looked like an old homestead, stopping with a jolt. Connor went around back to check the flatbed while I got a good look at the “storehouse”. It was abandoned, to put it lightly: an old cherry wood barn that appeared to be held up by the vines decorating its walls. There was a great black streak down the front that rippled to the left, charcoal scars burned in from what I could only assume was a lightning strike. Despite it all, the strangest part about the old place was the distinct warm glow of an oil lantern that wormed its way through the cracked planks, breathing a strange lost life into the proud old relic. Reluctantly, I ventured through the crumbling old double doors, the sound of steel on wood greeting me. A dozen crates sit stacked against the sidewall as two coated men stand guard against the stock. One is on a lone crate covered in scratches, his brown hair is short and well kept. His gray overcoat and shoes are covered with shavings from a small wooden carving he meticulously details with a large hunting knife. The other leans against a molding support beam, sporting a blue flat cap with matching overcoat, a bushy brown beard, and fiery orange eyes that glare at me like those of a wolf discov-



ering a lone, wounded calf.

“You’re... seven minutes late” He growls, checking the tattered remains of a leather watch. “If we want smooth roads we better move fast.”

Shuffling feet crunch dried grass, crickets sing rhythmically into the darkness, wood knocks wood as crates hit the truck bed one after another. An uneasy silence falls on us as we work, broken only by the occasional creak of a barn door or the muffled clinking of bottles. Grey Coat finishes his carving before helping us, placing the tranquil visage of a bear into his full looking pocket. When we eventually finish, I hand Orange Eyes the small envelope, securing the remaining crates with rope and closing the back. He flips through it quietly, carefully, checking once, then twice, then thrice, then his watch again.

“You’re short a dollar for wasting my time” He perks up, pocketing the cash. Connor leans on the front of the truck, quietly puffing into the night.

“Well tough shit, I don’t got my wallet on me” I snap back reflexively. His eyes start smoldering; Grey Coat expressionlessly saunters towards me as Connor puffs another cloud into the stars.

“We both wanna see the sun tomorrow, right?” Grey Coat sighs, leaning against the truck calmly as he starts a new piece of wood. “Let’s not do this over a dollar.” Being this close, I finally notice the pungent aroma of rotting arbor and sawdust on his coat. Connor breathes a wispy stream of smoke that fades silently into the trees.

“Seven minutes and you think you can change terms just like that” It’s only now that I meet his glare: tempered blue eyes, icy, piercing, haunted. Wood shavings hit my chest rhythmically, steel carving wood so close I hear each grain crying out. I don’t back down. I can’t back down.

His voice breaks through: “For Christ sakes, it’s just a damn dollar Mary”

Green appears in my peripheral as Connor holds a grimy bill out to the whittler, cigarette embers drifting gently towards a now mutilated carving. Silence – then the sound of shuffling paper as Grey Coat walks away mumbling something under his breath. Orange eyes gives a reluctant nod, sulking towards the old barn as our engine springs to life.



“I swear to whatever god’s up there Mar, one of these days that mouth of yours is gonna put us both under.” Connor shouts, hitting a bump on the road in the process. “You know, sometimes I can’t tell if you got anything between your ears at all.”

“We’re alive, aren’t we?” I say, slumping further into my seat.

“No thanks to you and your shoutin’. You got lots to say but never a good way to say it.” He takes a deep breath, unstiffening his shoulders. “Ya’ have to get that temper of yours under wraps Mar’, for both our sakes.”

I stare blankly into that wet grassy countryside, yellow hills that lead to distant gray mountains. Plains become homesteads, roads turn from dirt to concrete, trees are thinned by mechanic shops and parking lots. The glow of headlights floods into my eyes and worms into my head, it’s intoxicating to my tired soul. I take a deep breath and smell the freshly crushed gravel under our wheels; and as the old barn becomes a distant, fading thought, I manage to sputter out something from the depths of bliss:

“It reminds me of home.”

*Teddy Cleek*

Thousands of Irene Adams' gilded eyes gazed back at her from the fractured mirror as she sat down at her vanity. The pink marble was littered with pieces of glass that glinted in the dark orange sunlight, hazy from one of the various California wildfires ripping through the countryside. As she gingerly swept the shards into a small black trash can, she looked up and noticed a single black streak running down her cheek.

"How did *you* get there?" Irene hushly whispered to the streak, a sad smile spreading across her pale face as she ran her fingers over it. She normally remembered to wear waterproof mascara; it was a pain to remove but stayed put when required. Oh well, you couldn't be perfect *all* the time. Prior to this morning, though, no one had ever been closer to perfect than Irene Adams. She religiously got her hair dyed a dark brown every Sunday and was never seen with a blouse wrinkled or a shoe scuffed. You could find her most days perched on the backyard veranda with sweet tea in hand, instructing gardeners on what to plant in her plots. Crystal vases bursting with bluebells graced every table, and fresh batches of cookies perpetually cooled on the stove.

Irene took deep, shaky breaths as she wiped the makeup off of her face. Perhaps marrying a rich septuagenarian prick before you could legally drink wasn't the best idea, but no matter: this was the price she paid for the life she led. She should be used to it by now. It had been five years since she moved to Los Angeles from rural Nevada, three and a half since she met Gerald, and two since she moved into the shocking white mansion he bought for the two of them in Calabasas. Two years was plenty enough time to get used to it. Other women had, so why couldn't she?



It was now 5PM, and Gerald wasn't home. Irene sat at the

window clutching a cup of coffee, watching the shadows of palm trees grow longer and longer across their driveway. Every time Irene called him it went straight to voicemail, and he hadn't opened any of her texts. They'd fought badly before, even as badly as they did last night, but he had never disappeared like this.

Maybe it was because of the job. Irene had grown bored staying at home all day and had run out of room for more houseplants, so she'd started working part-time at a local nursery. She had loved plants since she was a little girl, picking purple tomatoes in her father's garden and letting the juice burst into her mouth and down her shirt. She'd initially wanted to garden at home, but Gerald believed yard work was unbecoming of her, so this was her best option. Irene had been able to keep it a secret for three months, but last night he found her name badge. He'd pinned her to the vanity mirror, pushing her into it until it began to buckle under the pressure-

Suddenly, Irene found herself kneeling in the backyard with tears running down her face, hands in the warm dirt. She wiggled her fingers, displacing some soil, and chuckled. It was a wonderful feeling, a feeling she had long since forgotten. A flood of memories came back to her: pollen dusted fingers after harvesting tomatoes, the itchiness of zucchini leaves, towering artichokes in bloom and her father's dirt-caked hands on her little shoulders as she tore kohlrabi out of the ground. She'd forgotten how her father's hands felt.

Irene sat there in the periwinkle twilight, inhaling the earthy air. There was electricity in the soil, she could *feel* it. She pulled her hands out of the ground and wiped them on her dress, hungrily crawling through the yard while examining the weeds. She grinned: despite the RoundUp, her husband had instructed the gardeners to use, perky dandelions popped up through the rocks unperturbed, reaching for the heavens.



It was 3AM when she finally heard his key twist in the front door. Irene couldn't discern whether she felt relieved or terrified that he was home. She heard his coat drop to the floor, followed by a coughing fit and a symphony of fucks, shits, and goddamnits. Charming as ever. As he stomped up the stairs, Irene clenched her fists and squeezed her eyes shut, still too nervous to sleep. If he thought she was asleep, maybe he wouldn't bother her. Gerald thumped into the room, wheezing, and lifted up the covers of the bed before pausing.

"Irene."

She tensed, and the room flooded with light. Irene slowly sat up in bed, as if not to disturb a mountain lion, and turned to look at him. At that moment, it was as if she saw Gerald for the first time. He was standing by the light switch, his old, tired face contorted into a grotesque frown. A tight white undershirt clung to his sagging chest, which looked like a sack of potatoes. Dark gray hair sprouted out of the top of his head in clumps, pathetically combed over to the right in an attempt to hide his balding. In his left hand was her green sundress, streaked with dirt and grass stains.

"Do you know how much this cost? *Do you?*"

Irene didn't know, and for once she didn't care. As Gerald continued to scream, she slid out of bed and pulled on a terry cloth bathrobe. She calmly walked over to him and punched him in the nose. Blood began gushing out, running down his face and onto his shirt. Gerald stood in stunned silence, and she glared deeply into his eyes. Suddenly, he snapped. He pushed her through the doorway to their bedroom, and she slammed against the railing of the hallway. Irene scrambled to her feet, bolting toward the stairs in a panic. *Oh my god, what the fuck am I doing, he's trying to kill me.*

"After all I've done for you?! You're *dead!*" Gerald screeched,

lunging after her. He kicked her in the back just as she began sprinting down the stairs, and she tumbled into the front hall, slamming into an accent table next to the door. Irene laid there in a daze, eyesight swimming in and out of focus. Gerald hobbled the rest of the way down the stairs, loomed over her and spat in her face.

“You crazy, ungrateful bitch. I’m done.” he mumbled before yanking his keys off the rack and walking into the driveway. Irene wanted to cry, but only found anger instead of tears. She was too tired to move, watching his car pull out the driveway and barrel down the street. Who knew what he was up to now. Maybe he was going to pick up divorce papers, maybe he was going to find another barely-18 girl naïve enough to trust him. Regardless of what he was doing, she prayed he wouldn’t come back.

After what felt like a decade, she pulled herself to her feet and realized she’d sent a potted daffodil flying when colliding with the table. Irene frowned. “I’m sorry, baby.” She whispered, gently scooping the dirt back into the pot and placing the plant inside. By now, the orange of daybreak had begun to illuminate the room. The flower almost seemed to glow, its yellow petals electric and alive in the morning light. Irene was mesmerized. She began to think of her father.

Rapping on the door shook her from her stupor. Irene groggily rose to her feet and placed the daffodil in the center of the table, shaking her hands out. She backed away slowly, clenching and unclenching her fists as the knocking began to ramp up in intensity. If Gerald was unwilling to get out of her life, she would have to forcibly remove him. Irene pulled a framed childhood photo of her holding a zucchini off the wall and held it menacingly above her head, stalking toward the door before looking through the eyehole.

What she didn’t expect to see were two police officers. Irene almost dropped the photo. She placed it next to the daffodil on

the table and timidly opened the door, giving each of them an inquisitive look. “Um...hello, officers.”

“Good morning, ma’am. Are you Irene Adams?”

“I-Irene. Irene Adams. Is there something wrong?”

“May we come inside?”

She turned to the side and gestured weakly inside, cold sweat dripping down her spine. They steered left into the living room and sat down on a white leather couch. Irene sat opposite them in a brown loveseat flanked by dark purple orchids, and her mind began to race with possibilities. *Had Gerald called them? Were they here to throw her out? Were they here to arrest her?*

“It’s about your husband.”

The daffodil teetered off the side of the hall table and onto the floor, its clay pot shattering and spreading dirt everywhere. The men in front of her jumped and yelped in surprise, but Irene was unruffled. Looking at the soil scattered across the spotless marble floor, she now knew why the police were here. She turned her back to them, looking out the window in wonder as ambulances rushed down the street, sirens screeching into the air. Irene then looked back at the daffodil, still on the floor, shimmering in the sunlight like a glittering promise.

In the light of the orange morning an old blind man shuffled along the side of a dirt road, finding his way with the end of his cane. On the hill ahead was a large church, a silhouette in front of the rising sun.

He felt his keys and felt for the bump of the dead bolt. The door opened to the familiar smell of votive smoke in the vestibule. He climbed the stairs to the church's bell tower and when inside waved his arm until it hit the rope. He couldn't hear the bell, being deaf, but he could feel its ringing through the rope, and he smiled. When he was done, he didn't stay. He couldn't enjoy the mass, but he enjoyed calling people to it.



"You never been to this church?" Tony asked. He ran his hand through his red hair that was molten in the old, parked truck's cab light.

"No," Clea said, standing outside and staring at the cloudy night sky, "our family went to the one across town." Her face was a pale moon floating in the moonless night of her hair and obscured by two black clouds of eye shadow. She pulled the foggy flaps of her unbuttoned, woolen sweater around her.

"You go on ahead," Tony said. "I need to find my lighter."

Without looking away or answering, Clea drifted toward the trail that led up to the church. Tony reached under the bench seat of his truck. He pulled out a steel bar with a hole in one end and a metal ball on the other. For a moment Tony put it back under the seat but instead he lifted the back of his denim jacket and slid it into the waist of his pants. Clea continued her transit toward the church.

"Tonight," he said.





---

“Got it.” Tony said, holding up the lighter, to Clea who waited by the front door still looking at the sky. He didn’t bother trying the knob; he just stepped through the hole in the wall and Clea followed.

The opening left a black band of soot across his hand. He could taste the charcoal on his tongue. Votive candles, in their red glass, lay like a bouquet of beheaded roses across the floor. The walls of the vestibule were gouged with black gashes made by dead flames. Leaning amongst the pews like a dying tree was a giant black cross stabbed into the floor like a knife.

“I was here when that happened,” Tony said. “I was sitting in my truck at my parents’, smoking and watching the lightning. It was all over the ridge. I saw it hit the bell tower and it caught fire. I drove right over here.” He walked into the middle of the nave, beside the cross. “The whole top of the tower was red and the cross just fell right into the roof.” After a moment, Tony shook his head. “No one came. The whole time I was here no one came. They spent all this money building this place. They came here for a few years, droned their dull songs, thinking they’d be saved and then they stopped. They just moved on to the next thing: that train that just goes in a circle around the edge of town. — I came here to watch it fuckin’ burn and no one even came.” He sat down in a pew. “The storm put the fire out its own self with the rain.”

“No one ever comes,” Clea said. She walked toward the cross. The opening in the roof was full of black clouds. The sound of gravel ground beneath her feet. She picked up a handful of stained-glass shards.

“I did that,” Tony said. “When I saw no one was coming I bashed in the windows.”

“Why?” Clea asked, turning toward the cross.

“Why not?”

Tony removed the bar from under his jacket and set it beside him. He looked at it as if he were arguing with it.

Clea stood in the pool of lighter darkness beneath the wounded roof and, as though called, lifted her face to the gathering storm and the occluded heavens beyond. Her black curls, like cumulus clouds, fell away from the full moon of her face as her mouth opened to the opening above.

Clea sang.

In the dim light of the church Tony’s face had the shape of a tooth, canine, but as Clea sang the tooth loosened. He didn’t know the words or even the language of her song, but he knew the tone and so he didn’t need the words. It was the tone of reverence. The church groaned and shuddered in the wind. The clouds moved toward them over the ovular opening, and as the last of them passed away, and her song ended, the gray eye of night opened.

“Euoi!” Clea declared.

The full moon’s light spilled into the church like a quiet flood. The rubble of stained glass became a galaxy of stars on the floor. The moon blessed the smote cross with a silver lining. Clea’s hair was mercurial and Tony’s a dark ruby.

Tony, stunned: “I - didn’t know you sang.”

“You don’t *know* me,” Clea said to the sky. “I had to sing every Sunday at church. I hated it. Their songs are so unnatural. This one was my own.”

“What does it mean?”

Clea didn’t answer. The church was silent.

Tony stood and placed the bar back in his waistband. He picked up a votive candle from the floor and lit it. “Let’s go upstairs.”

As they passed through the door at the top of the staircase Clea grabbed the rope hanging in the middle of the room and pulled. There was only a dull thump that she felt through the rope.

"It doesn't ring," Tony told her.

He climbed a wooden ladder and opened the hatch into the belfry. Most of the tower was gone except for the burned walls whose boards made a briar of spikes. Tony set the candle down on the dirty floor. The rain had cleansed the bell of its dust and it glowed with the moon's redeeming beams and accents of the votive candle's red reflections.

Tony pushed away a burnt beam that was leaning against the bell's arch. "That's what it was hitting." He pushed the bell and it swung silently. Clea stood at half a round window and its severed jaw of broken glass. She looked up again, moonbound. Tony withdrew into the only dark corner in the room. In its shadow, his hair, a flame in the daytime, swayed like bloody waves in the wind. He removed the knobbed bar from his back and flipped it in his hand. He hesitated.

Clea, looking at the moon: "Why did you ask me to come here?"

"I - I wanted to show you something."

Tony moved out of the shadows and toward her. He knelt beside the bell and slid himself under it. When he emerged and stood, the bar was gone.

"Clea. Stand next to me."

She pulled herself away from the moon's gravity.

Tony lifted the rim of the bell toward him with both hands.

"Push it like a kid on a swing."

They both heaved the bell toward the broken window and the town below.

The bell's ring declared itself to the night as though waking from a long sleep and shivered the remaining glass in the widows. On the bell's return its ring was dampened by their hands as they inherited its toll into their bones. Clea laughed, tickled by the vibration, and Tony smiled with her.

During the ringing, lights had come on in the sleepy homes in the valley below. They left the bell to rock itself to sleep and went to see the sleeping valley wake. Standing by the jagged crescent of glass, Tony wiped sweat from his brow and smiled at Clea smiling at him. From around a hillside, yellow beams swiped at the night.

"Someone is coming," Tony warned. "Let's go."

Leaving the candle behind, they sneaked downstairs and through the nave. Flashlights of headlight peered through the holes in the lobby walls. The side door lay like a doormat in front of its frame. Outside, clouds of dirty powder rose around their quickening feet. They leapt from the landing into the meadow and descended toward the truck. Their silver and ruby hair, still imbued by the moon, flailed as they fled downhill, through gray grass, laughing.



In the orange morning the old deaf and blind man shuffled along the side of the dirt road, tapping the ground in front of him with his cane. He entered the ruins of the church and made his way up to the room with the rope. As he rang the bell, an ancient frisson reached into his limbs. Something had changed. The bell felt like it rang more clearly now, more true.

*Jamileth Moran*

I first saw Anthony on a Wednesday morning in third grade, and I thought he was beautiful. It was a few months into the quarter and Anthony had moved into town. I wasn't a very talkative kid, but something about seeing him stand alone made my heart ache.

"Hey! I'm Marisol. I noticed you standing by yourself, are you new?"

"Yeah, I am." He looked uncomfortable and his cheeks were pink. "I'm Anthony," he said after a while.

"Cool. Anthony. We can be friends if you want!" I think I embarrassed him. He didn't say anything else. He just turned around to face the front of the line. When we got into class, Anthony was assigned the seat next to mine. I gave him an encouraging smile and he looked away. I couldn't tell if he was shy or if he genuinely didn't like me. Ms. Houston introduced him to the class, and we got started immediately. She passed out a multiplication sheet to all of us, telling Anthony that he could participate if he wanted to, but he didn't have to. I was excited because I was the best at multiplication. I was the fastest and smartest of the class. Ms. Houston set up a timer for one minute and announced we could begin. I flipped the page over and started answering questions, pride and joy flowing out of me instantly. I knew all of the problems. I made quick work of it all.

Once I finished, I looked over at Anthony and noticed he was sitting with the page turned over, his hands clasped together. I gave him a smile, trying to convey my thoughts. *It's alright that you didn't do it. You'll get it next time.* Again, he just looked away, fixating on his hands in front of him. Once Ms. Houston called time, we were all to pass the papers to our left, to have our neighbor correct our pages. I was surprised when Anthony placed his paper in front of me. I thought he hadn't done the problems. When I

turned it over, I saw that each question had been answered. That meant he had finished before I had. I glanced through the problems. They were all correct. Not a single mistake. I looked over to my left at my own paper and noticed one problem was circled. I'd missed a question. I was in disbelief. This quiet, shy, boy had bested me in multiplication. I avoided his eyes when I passed his paper back to him. I was humiliated.

I went home after school that day and immediately started practicing my multiplication until dinner time. I continued doing so for the following week. In school, I avoided Anthony. It wasn't like he was trying to strike up a friendship with me or anything. I just didn't interact more than what was necessary.

The next Wednesday, I was prepared. We got our multiplication sheets and Ms. Houston set up a timer. There was a charged energy in the room. This was my chance for a do-over. Either Anthony proved he was better than me, or I proved that his beating me was a fluke. As soon as Ms. Houston said we could begin, I tore into the page. Answer after answer escaped from my fingers and when I was done, I immediately flipped the page and looked over at Anthony, who was still working. I sat looking at him with my hands clasped, smiling, waiting for him to finish. 5 seconds later, he did. He saw me smiling at him. It was probably the meanest smile I'd ever smiled. He frowned at me and then gave me an equally mean smile. It said, *Fine you were faster this time, but who got more questions right?*

We waited impatiently for the seconds to count down, smiling awfully at one another. When time was up, we practically shoved our papers to the left. I looked through all of his answers, all correct. I started to sweat. I had been sure that all of mine were correct, but doubt started creeping up on me. We handed the papers back. I'd gotten them all right as well. Anthony looked over at my paper and he frowned, frustrated. I didn't try to hide my gloating face. Sure, Anthony and I were both perfect in our

answers, but I was faster. And he knew it.

And so began the greatest rivalry that ever existed. Oh, we were *vicious* to each other. As years went by, we found ourselves always vying for the top spot in all of our classes, from elementary to high school. When I started playing the trombone in band, he took up the euphonium and we fought over solos. When he started academic decathlon, I made sure to join too and we competed for medals. Every Valentine's Day, we'd compete to see who could sneak hearts into the other's backpack more stealthily than the other. We were obsessed with winning and with each other.

When we were 16, we both started dating other people. That became a competition too. It started when he dated my best friend, Giselle so then I started dating *his* best friend, Jimmy. Then he broke Giselle's heart, so I *destroyed* Jimmy. When we were 17, I started dating Kevin, who I liked well enough, but he was a little dull. Anthony started dating Kevin's cousin, Emily, who was the most boring person I'd ever met. Of course, this meant we *had* to double date.

The last of these dates went especially bad. I had shown up wearing a stunning red dress, clutching Kevin's arm while he wore an anime shirt and jeans as usual. Anthony showed up looking exquisite in a button-up shirt and slacks, Emily looked plain as ever on his arm. I made a show of holding onto Kevin and pressing soft kisses on his cheek, making sure Anthony could see each peck. Anthony in turn went fishing for Emily's tonsils with his tongue, making the waiter uncomfortable as he stood by to take our order. I was seething. It was just so rude of him.

"Marisol, did I tell you that I'm having dinner with Emily's parents next week?" Anthony said in a would-be sly tone.

"Nope, must have just slipped your little mind," I said, trying to conceal my shock. Dinner with the parents was serious business.

“Did I tell *you* that Kevin said he loved me more than his Xbox 360?” I said, smugly.

“Not at all! Did you make sure to tell him *just* how much *you* love *him*?” He said, saccharine dripping from his mouth.

“Oh, I made sure to *show* him just how much I love him, Anthony,” my too-innocent voice slipped out of me. This had the intended effect, or course. Anthony turned red, clamped up, and refused to speak to me the rest of dinner.

Dinner came to an end, and we made it outside, for what was usually a competition to see who could make out with their partners the longest before coming up for air. This time, however, Kevin and Emily stood in front of me, and Anthony and they both looked... pissed. I reached out for Kevin while Anthony reached out for Emily, and we were both rejected.

“We’re breaking up with you,” Emily said, sounding interesting for the first time since I’ve met her.

“Wait, you’re *both* breaking up with us?” Anthony said, flatly.

“Yeah, you asshole. We’re done being pawns in your little games. You both have issues. You’re obsessive. You’re selfish. You both *clearly* have feelings for each other and you’re just using us to get a rise out of the other. It’s really shitty.” Kevin said. He and Emily walked away, not giving us a chance to defend ourselves. Not that we really could. They were right. We were shitty people.

Anthony laughed. “Damn that was bad. I almost met her parents.”

“Oh, my breakup with Kevin is definitely *far* more devastating than yours and Emily’s. I sucked his dick, dude. I definitely won that one,” I said, laughing as well.

Anthony glared at me for a second and then smiled again. “Fine, you win. But only because I’m too much of a gentleman.”

“Shut the fuck up. You just couldn’t close.” We laughed again,



got in his car, and he drove us home. Junior year ended without much incident. We continued competing but didn't date anyone else.

Senior year started and again, we were in all the same classes, including A.P.s and classes at the local community college. It was time for me to get serious. I had excelled in school, but I'd never really considered what I wanted my career to be. Anthony and I had applied and gotten into all the same colleges (for competitions sake of course) but I had no idea where I really wanted to go. Time was running out and I was stressed. It was winter break when Anthony texted me to meet him at the local Starbucks "unless you're scared", which of course, I wasn't, so I showed up.

"What do you want, ugly?" I said, walking to the table Anthony was sitting at.

He pushed a cup of my favorite drink towards me as I sat down. "Marisol, where are we going to go for college?" he asked.

"We?" There is no 'we' Anthony," I said, lying of course.

"Alright, let's cut the bullshit. Now, I'm partial to the Ivy Leagues, but we both know that I'd follow you anywhere, so just pick a place and we'll go," he said, shocking the hell out of me.

"What the fuck does that mean, Anthony? 'You'd follow me anywhere'" I said, mocking his voice. "Do you even hear yourself?"

He rolled his eyes, took a sip of his coffee, and pursed his lips. We started a staring competition that I lost.

"Anthony, I have no idea what I want to do with my life. Everything I've done and succeeded at has been to spite you and now we have a huge decision to make, and I don't even know what I want. It's fucking terrifying."

"Of course it's terrifying. We've been playing this game for 10 years and neither of us really looked past our next competition. We have so many options and I know we can probably succeed at anything we want to do because that's just who we are. It's overwhelming." That's the most honest we'd ever been with each

other.

“Look, Anthony. All I know is that I don’t want to spend the rest of my life competing in the same career as you.”

“Does that mean I won?” he asked, smiling that irritating smile of his.

“Absolutely not.” I glared at him.

Anthony sighed and said, “Alright. We won’t go into the same career. But we’re going to the same college. I won’t compromise on that. So just pick a place.”

“Why is this on me?” I asked.

“Because, like I said, I’ll follow you anywhere.” He emphasized every word. My heartbeat so loudly in my ears, that I was sure he could hear it.

“Fine. I’ll pick a place and let you know. But you and I are dating now. I won’t compromise on *that*.” I said, pointedly.

Anthony laughed. “I knew it! I knew you’d cave and ask me out before I asked you out. You lose.”

“Please, you all but confessed your love to me. ‘I’ll follow you anywhere.’ Who *says* that? You lost, obviously.” I said laughing.

Senior year came to a close. We took turns asking each other to prom and turning the other down right up till the day of. Then we had an epic dance battle in front of everyone where I lost. We tied for valedictorian. We gave a shared speech and then he followed me to Harvard, where he studied Math, and I studied Biology. Then I followed him to Georgetown, and he became a Physicist and I an Epidemiologist. We eventually got married and of course competed over our vows (I won because he cried harder). And then the kids came, and we competed for their love (they grew up *entirely* spoiled). Our whole lives have been this competition, and I’m glad to say, we’ve both won.

# Contributor Biographies

---

**Samantha Aguilar** is an English major studying at State Center Community College District. Aguilar has always enjoyed creative writing as a hobby and is excited to share work about ideas, which blends the imagery of poetry and the format of prose.

**Artemis** is a Creative Writing student at De Anza College, despite having a major in astrophysics. He views life as everything relating to a video game (people being NPCs, lives in plotlines, information being lore, dialogue boxed interactions, etc.), and that is reflected in several of their works.

**Veralyn Beaumont** is attending Golden West College. From a young age, Beaumont's active imagination inspired a desire for storytelling. This hunger led Beaumont to discover a love for reading and writing. Now as an English major, Beaumont hopes to grow as a fiction writer.

**Audrey Bergen** is currently attending Fresno State University, but was attending Clovis Community College when these poems were written. Bergen's work has been accepted for publication with *Kings River Review* for the second time.

**Thomas Boyce-Pottichen** is an aspiring speculative fiction author, enrolled in the English and Creative Writing programs at the Community College of Philadelphia. Boyce-Pottichen likes to use writing to promote social justice and is a product of the city's public arts and Free Library.

**Teddy Cleek** is an aspiring queer writer honing their craft at Santa Rosa Junior College. They love music, baking, and horrible movies.

**Paige Crawford** is a student at SCCCD, studying English for a future goal of editing manuscripts for self-published authors. Crawford enjoys writing, reading, and music.

**RC Davis** is a trans, sober poet originally from Oak Park, Illinois. He is the 2021 National Student Poet of the Midwest and has work published in the anthology *Respect the Mic* and various literary journals. Davis currently resides at a treatment center in Idaho and also attends North Idaho College.

**Read Davis** is a freshman at Santa Monica College. Davis has been writing poetry for quite a while now, and upon discovering *Kings River Review* publication thought it was a wonderful opportunity to share some work.

**Nikki Do** is a third-year transfer student at UC Berkeley as an English major and wrote these pieces in fall 2021 at Golden West College. In the future, Do plans on becoming a storyteller in and outside of the classroom.

**Reginald Esterhase** is a psychology major at Santa Rosa Junior College. He enjoys reading about Jungian psychology as well as hiking in local parks.

**Gavin Garza** is a student and tutor currently attending Fresno City College. Raised in a cult, Garza now majors in English with aspirations of being a teacher and writer. He loves learning about politics, environmentalism, foreign languages, and the arts since they reconnect him to himself and the secular world.

**Tyson Higel** is a nursing student at Whatcom Community College and is living in Bellingham, WA. If Higel is not with patients or studying coursework, He is, almost certainly, working on his poems and short stories.

**Sofia Jarski** is a student at Golden West College. Jarski is a part-time barista and full-time daydreamer who loves to consume and create stories with big themes about love, life, and loss condensed into gritty little details. Jarski's biggest project for the past four

years has been a *Star Wars*-meets-*The Crown* sci-fi book saga.

**Michaela Lagas** is currently attending Bakersfield Community College as an English Major, aiming to graduate summer of 2024. Creative writing has been a large portion of Lagas's life since the age of nine. Poetry was one form of writing that Lagas found most difficult, but when attending a Creative Writing class at Bakersfield College, Lagas found a deeper understanding and love for poetry.

**Jua Lee** is a second-year student at Reedley College. Lee received a Creative Writing certificate in spring 2021 and is currently majoring in English.

**Kaden Maguglin** is an art student at Moorpark College looking to transfer soon.

**Jamileth Moran** is an English Major at Fresno City College. Moran enjoys reading and writing romance novels, mainly. Moran looks forward to continue writing and hopes to make it a full-fledged career one day.

**Tina Tien Nguyen** is a student at Golden West College majoring in Creative Writing. Most of Nguyen's artwork is inspired by favorite artists and memorable moments in life.

**Lavender Passalacqua** is a student at Santa Rosa Junior College.

**Ethan Perkins** attends Madera Community College. Perkins has been taking art classes since middle school. Perkin's career path is Art-Two Dimensional and is looking forward to getting an Associates Degree in that career pathway soon.

**Chris Pope** is a student at Cabrillo College, Aptos, CA.

**Noah David Roberts** is a non-binary poet and artist attending Community College of Philadelphia. Roberts is the author of the

poetry collections *Us v. Them*, *Strips*, *Slime Thing* [and other poems], and *Final Girl Mythos*. Roberts has poems published in *Big Scream*, *Tribes Magazine*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, and more.

**Jay Rose** is a southern raised queer poet. Rose loves to be scared but hates to get startled. Rose is currently enjoying the pleasures of the creative writing and poetry building in Oakland California, at Laney College. Rose lives in a castle by the bay that is unfortunately devoid of all ghosts.

**Jordynn Sumpter** is a third-year student at Clovis Community College and an aspiring horror author. Sumpter is currently drafting a first novel, *Death Flirts Back*, a tragic horror story about love, rage, and loss. Sumpter enjoys writing poetry, spoiling her cat, and drinking too much iced coffee.

**Jonah Young** is an Art Major at Reedley College working towards a goal of obtaining a Studio Arts degree. When not working on art, Young is enjoying other hobbies such as cooking, gaming, and having fun with friends.

## Call for Submissions



The *Kings River Review* publishes artwork, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and poetry of community college students from across the country and features a Reedley College writer and artist in each edition.

### Submission Deadlines:

March 15 for the spring and October 15 for the fall edition

### Submission Requirements:

- ◆ Artwork & Photography: Up to 5 pieces sent as .JPEG files
- ◆ Creative Nonfiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Fiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Poetry: Up to 5 poems

### All submissions must be:

- ◆ titled.
- ◆ formatted in Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx, or .rtf).
- ◆ formatted in 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- ◆ double spaced.
- ◆ free of mechanical and grammatical errors. The *Kings River Review* reserves the right to make any editing changes deemed necessary.
- ◆ original, previously unpublished work. Non-English submissions must include English translations.

### In the body of your email:

- ◆ Indicate the genre and title of each submission (Artwork, Creative Nonfiction, Fiction, or Poetry).
- ◆ Include a biography, including the name of your college (fewer than 50 words).
- ◆ Include your email address, mailing address, and phone number.

How to Submit: Email your submissions following the above requirements to [kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu](mailto:kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu). You will be notified via email regarding acceptance and/or work we cannot accept.

Questions? E-mail us: [kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu](mailto:kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu)





*Samantha Aguilar*

*Artemis*

*Veralyn Beaumont*

*Audrey Bergen*

*Thomas Boyce-Pottichen*

*Teddy Cleek*

*Paige Crawford*

*RC Davis*

*Read Davis*

*Nikki Do*

*Reginald Esterhase*

*Gavin Garza*

*Tyson Higuel*

*Sofia Jarski*

*Michaela Lagas*

*Jua Lee*

*Kaden Maguglin*

*Jamileth Moran*

*Tina Tien Nguyen*

*Lavender Passalacqua*

*Ethan Perkins*

*Chris Pope*

*Noah David Roberts*

*Jay Rose*

*Jordynn Sumpter*

*Jonah Young*

